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Second-Wave Feminist Approaches to Sexuality in Britain and France, c.1970-c.1983

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Second-Wave Feminist Approaches to Sexuality in Britain
and France, c.1970 – c.1983

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Abbreviations

Britain

Anti-Rape Group/Rape Action
Group
ARG

Leeds Revolutionary Feminist
Group
LRFG

Campaign Against Pornography
CAP

London Rape Action Group
LRAC

Consciousness-Raising
cr

National Abortion Campaign
NAC

Black Women For Wages For
Housework
BWFWH

National Health Service
NHS

Doctors For A Woman's Choice On
Abortion
DWCA

National Women's Liberation
Conference
NWLC

English Collective Of Prostitutes
ECP

Prostitutes For The Reform Of
Solicitation
PROS

Feminists Against Censorship
FAC

Prostitution Laws Are Nonsense
PLAN

Gay Liberation Front
GLF

Rape Crisis Centre
RCC

Reclaim The Night
RTN

Society For The Protection Of The
Unborn Child
SPUC

Women Against Violence Against
Women
WAVAW

Trades Union Congress
TUC

Women's Liberation Movement
WLM

Wages For Housework
WFH

Women's Liberation Workshop
WLW

Women Against Rape
WAR

France

Féminin Masculin Avenir
FMA

Mouvement Pour La Liberté de
l'Avortement Et De La Contraception
MLAC

Front Homosexuelle d'Action
Révolutionnaire
FHAR

Nouvelles Questions Féministes
NQF

Groupe Information Santé
GIS

Psychanalyse Et Politique
Psych et Po

Le Mouvement du Nid
Le Nid

Questions Féministes
QF

Le Mouvement pour la Liberté de
l'Avortement
MLA

Vive la Révolution
VLR

Mouvement de Libération des
Femmes
MLF

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DECLARATION

I,, am the sole author of this thesis; that, unless otherwise stated, all references cited have been consulted by me; that the work of which the thesis is a record has been done by me, and that it has not been previously accepted for a higher degree.

Signature:

STATEMENT

I confirm that the conditions of the relevant Ordinance and Regulations have been fulfilled.

Signature:

Abstract

This thesis compares the campaigns and debates on sexuality by the British 'Women's Liberation Movement' (WLM) and the French 'Mouvement de libération des femmes' (MLF), in the period c.1970 – c.1983. It examines five significant topics: abortion, lesbianism, pornography, prostitution, and rape, all of which were campaigned on by feminists in each country. There has been a distinct lack of historical comparative works on the two movements, and few attempts to compare their discussions and activism on sexuality, which has resulted in a limited view of each movement, something this thesis aims to rectify. Using written grassroots sources, published primary material, and oral history interviews, it argues there were broad similarities between the two movements, but differences in the scope, shape, and progression of their campaigns as a result of national, cultural, and social factors.

This study covers the period when each movement was at its height but also when it began to wane in activism, and explores how each approached sexuality in public campaigns and discussions. Examining multiple topics allows a deeper comparison of the feminist approach to sexuality, including: how they dealt with outside organisations; the significance of personal experience; and connections between class, sexuality, and the limits of 'sexual liberation'. By providing the first historical comparative analysis of the movements' approaches, this project shows there were many parallel ideas between the two as result of similar origins and outside influences. Yet it was national events and contexts that converted these ideas on politicising the personal into distinctive feminist activism, and a 'global sisterhood' manifested differently on each side of the Channel.

Introduction

In 1974, writing on the historical perception of women, two members of the 'Mouvement de libération des femmes' (MLF) wrote that 'the history of women unfolds in bed, is read in the horizontal [...] The history that taught us tries to accustom us to our own oppression, and thus to stifle any rebellious thoughts in us'.¹ The women's movements of the 1970s/80s in Britain and France rebelled against this historical oppression, bringing taboo and personal subjects into the public sphere, an approach best represented by their discussions and campaigns on sexuality. Building on a broader swell of left-wing engagement in this period, both the MLF and the 'Women's Liberation Movement' (WLM) demonstrated that collective political activism could be based on the feelings and experiences of individual women. Despite this, there has been little comparative research conducted on these campaigns and debates on sexuality, which this thesis aims to remedy.

The Politics of Sexuality

Across much of Europe and North America, the 1960s (or the long 1960s, generally classed as 1957-1975) was a period of great social, cultural, and legal upheaval. Both Britain and France underwent economic and population growth following the Second World War, and young people in these years often had different life expectations from their parents.² In France, the 1968 protests drastically altered many social paradigms for those involved, while in Britain the

¹'Annie' and 'Anne'. Cited and translated in Theresia Sauter-Bailliet, 'The Feminist Movement in France' in *The Women's Liberation Movement: Europe and North America*, ed. Jan Bradshaw (Elsevier, 2013), 409.

²For more information, see Axel Schildt and Detlef Siegfried, *Between Marx and Coca-Cola: Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies, 1960–1980* (Berghahn Books, 2005); Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth, *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956–1977* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Richard Ivan Jobs, *Riding the New Wave: Youth and the Rejuvenation of France after the Second World War* (Stanford University Press, 2007).

'New Left' rejected orthodox Marxist theory and attempted to develop a fresh political analysis of social issues.³ There was an awareness by people in these movements of being part of a broader wave of progressive activism, and events like the American Civil Rights or anti-Vietnam War protests, and European student protests, influenced the actions and discussions of left-wing activists and feminists in each country.⁴ These movements were primarily social and cultural, not economic, and have been classed by theorists such as Alain Touraine or Alberto Melucci amongst others as 'new social movements'.⁵ As Steven M. Beuchler notes, the theory came about as a response to the 'inadequacies of classical Marxism for analyzing collective action' in this period.⁶

There was also a growth of a new approach to sexuality. As Callum G. Brown notes, most historians agree there was a 'sexual revolution'; but disagree on when it started, how gradual or revolutionary it was, how far it was shared

³For more information on the New Left see Maurice Cranston, *The New Left: Six Critical Essays* (Bodley Head, 1970); Holger Nehrig, "Out of Apathy": Genealogies and Meanings of the British "New Left" in a Transnational Context', in *Between Prague Spring and French May: Opposition and Revolt in Europe, 1960–1980*, eds. Martin Klimke, Jacco Pekelder and Joachim Scarloth (Berghan Books, 2011), 15-31; John McMillan and Paul Buhle, *The New Left Revisited* (Temple University Press, 2003). See also Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright, *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism* (Merlin Press, 1979), which examined the relationship between the WLM and the broader left.

⁴For example, Sheila Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream: Remembering the Sixties* (Penguin Books, 2000), 179, where she discussed May 1968; Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation* (Picador Press, 1987), 13-14, where they point to the American Civil Rights movement as a strong influence; Serge Cosseron, *Dictionnaire de l'extrême gauche* (Larousse, 2007), 238-239, which highlights the anti-Vietnam protests as a significant factor in the radicalisation of French leftists.

⁵For more information see Alain Touraine, 'An Introduction to the Study of Social Movements', *Social Research* 52:4 (1985): 749-787; Alberto Melucci, 'A Strange Kind of Newness: What's "New" in New Social Movements?', in *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity*, eds. Enrique Larana, Hank Johnston and Joseph R. Gusfield (Temple University Press, 1994), 101-130; id., *Nomad of the Present* (Temple University Press, 1989); Vincenzo Ruggiero, *Social Movements: A Reader* (Routledge, 2008); Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper, *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts* (John Wiley & Sons, 2009).

⁶Steven M. Beuchler, 'New Social Movement Theories', *The Sociological Quarterly* 36:3 (1995): 441-464.

across all Western countries, and whether it had been a 'good' or 'bad' thing.⁷ The idea of 'sexual permissiveness' became more popular, as many young people began to consciously differentiate their behaviour from that of their parents. Arthur Marwick defines permissiveness as 'a general sexual liberation, entailing striking changes in public and private morals and [...] a new frankness, openness and indeed honesty in personal relations and modes of expression'.⁸ This new 'permissive society' influenced many second-wave feminists, who frequently connected the private and public, and strived to create an open dialogue on the sexual experiences of women, as will be explored.

These ideas combined in the move by many left-wing intellectuals and activists in both countries to connect ideas of 'sexual liberation' and left-wing politics. For example, a 1966 publication of the left-wing review *Partisans* entitled 'Sexualité et répression' (Sexuality and Repression), featured various theorists discussing a selection of issues surrounding sexuality. These included: the connections between labour and sexuality, marriage, and the works of the Austrian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, whose ideas on sexuality, as will be seen in Chapter Six, were significant to many French male leftists.⁹ In both countries, this connection of 'sexual repression' and capitalism grew in influence throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s. Many on the left believed alternative relationships should be explored, including living in communes or collectives, and political commitments should overcome any personal grievances. They advocated a 'revolt against feelings', arguing individuals should not get wrapped up in emotions, which were seen as bourgeois, but try to take a more liberated

⁷Callum G. Brown, *Religion and the Democratic Revolution: Women and Secularisation in Canada, Ireland, UK and USA Since the 1960s* (Boydell Press, 2012), 127. See also Daniel Borrillo and Danièle Lochak, eds., *La liberté sexuelle* (Presses universitaires de France, 2005).

⁸Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Social and Cultural Transformation in Britain, France and Italy, 1958-1974* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 34.

⁹Reich believed that 'sexual misery' was common among the working-class, as a result of external material conditions and sexual neuroses from dominant moral values. For more information, see Wilhelm Reich, 'The Sexual Misery of the Working Masses and the Difficulties of Sexual Reform', *New German Critique* 1 (1973): 98-110; Frédéric de Rivoyre, *Wilhelm Reich et la révolution sexuelle* (Puntum, 2006).

approach to sex.¹⁰ For many taking part in these movements, this was a way, as Robert Gildea, James Mark and Annette Warring note, to connect their politics to the most intimate parts of their lives: to make the personal political.¹¹ Many of those involved in left-wing and student activism in the 1960s believed it was not just politics that should change, but also education, the family structure, sexual relationships, and many other aspects of life.¹² These ideas existed in both countries, but sexual pleasure as necessary for political consciousness was arguably more explicit within *soixante-huitard*¹³ circles in France, and formed a more significant part of left-wing discussion than in Britain.

Yet for numerous women in Britain and France, this newfound 'liberation' was problematic. An underlying sexism remained, and the fear of being seen as frigid, prudish, or old-fashioned underpinned many women's relationships with men.¹⁴ Furthermore, many women realised sexual freedom and a new political consciousness did not erase male judgment of women's politics and sexual behaviour. In her memoir on the 1960s for example, the British feminist Sheila Rowbotham stated that many male leftists assumed that 'women were semi-permeable membranes who absorbed men's ideas through their semen', describing how, following a meeting, a man from the *Hornsey International Socialists* pinned her against a wall, saying: 'You've been fucking with a Stalinist'.¹⁵

Women involved in left-wing groups consequently began to realise that although sexuality was now a valid subject for debate, this new 'permissive

¹⁰Robert Gildea, James Mark and Annette Warring, eds., *Europe's 1968: Voices of Revolt* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 5; Matt Cook, 'Sexual Revolution(s) in Britain', in *Sexual Revolutions*, eds. Gert Hekma and Alain Giami (Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 128.

¹¹Gildea, Mark and Warring, *Europe's 1968*, 5.

¹²See Hekma and Giami, *Sexual Revolutions*, whose introduction has an excellent overview of the scope and impact of the 'sexual revolution' across Europe.

¹³'Sixty-eighters'. This was the term used for participants in the student and worker revolts of May 1968, or those who adopted the ideas of the movement.

¹⁴Gildea, Mark and Warring, *Europe's 1968*, 5; Anne-Claire Rebreyend, 'May 68 and the Changes in Private Life: a "Sexual Liberation"?', in *May 68: Rethinking France's Last Revolution*, eds. Julian Jackson, Anna Louise Milne and James S. Williams (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 156.

¹⁵Rowbotham, *Promise*, 227.

society' often repeated and enforced gender inequality. Rowbotham discussed how when working on the layout for an edition of the radical magazine *Black Dwarf* called '1969 Year of the Militant Woman', she was dismayed by the sexualised images chosen by the editors, stating that 'women's liberation in the designer's mind seemed to evoke everyone taking their clothes off'.¹⁶ Although the images were eventually scrapped, for Rowbotham this exposed 'the seedy side of the underground: arrogant, ignorant and prejudiced. It explains the anger which was shortly to cohere among many women who worked on the underground paper'.¹⁷ In France, some women came to similar conclusions. For example, two members of the MLF, Françoise Picq and Nadia Ringart, wrote a 1971 article for the left-wing publication *Tout!* entitled 'Your sexual revolution is not ours'. In it, they claimed previous copies of *Tout!* had given:

a certain image of the sexual revolution, by taking pleasure¹⁸ and the right to enjoy oneself¹⁹ as basic criteria [...] Since men and women are alienated, there is at present only an alienated concept of pleasure. New forms of pleasure need to be found.²⁰

As the women's liberation movement was born from wider left-wing groups, not descended from earlier feminist movements like the suffragettes, the way such groups approached sexuality was significant. It was through involvement with these groups and ideas that some women began to feel a political and social movement based on women's personal experiences was needed, and the most pressing of these were often connected to sexuality. As will be seen, the influence of left-wing politics and new sexual mores on feminists meant they frequently grappled with the role ideas of 'sexual liberation' and class politics should play in this new movement's approach to sexuality, and this thesis will explore the extent to which this analogous background contributed to a similarity in campaigns and discussions between the WLM and MLF.

¹⁶Ibid., 208.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸'jouissance' which has the double meaning of sexual pleasure and general enjoyment.

¹⁹In the French original, 'plus jouir' which can also mean to ejaculate.

²⁰Translation from Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 182.

Writings on the British Movement

The first scholarly analyses of the WLM were published in the 1980s, when the movement itself was starting to wane. David Bouchier's *The Feminist Challenge: The Movement for Women's Liberation in Britain and the United States* (1983)²¹ was one of the first to provide an overview of the origins and development of the movements in Britain and the USA. However, as Sarah F. Browne notes, feminists who were reluctant for women's liberation to be used to 'further academic careers' initially viewed Bouchier with suspicion.²² As a result, feminist activists began to write their own studies of the movement. For the WLM, such works included Sheila Rowbotham's *The Past is Before Us: Feminism in Action Since the 1960s* (1989) and Anna Coote and Beatrice Campbell's *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation* (1987).²³ Rowbotham's book is a thematic history of the ideas and assumptions of the movement, looking at campaigns around family, relationships, and housework amongst others, rather than a strict chronological history. *The Past is Before Us* examined the complicated feelings many feminists had about motherhood, relationships, and sexual desire, focusing particularly on the abortion campaigns and their role within the WLM. Coote and Campbell's book is also structured thematically, examining the movement through issues including family, legislation, trade unions, and sex. The authors claimed 'the relationship between sex and power lies at the heart of the struggle for women's liberation', and explored how women's relationships to their bodies impacted on their self-perception, as well as how they were viewed by others.²⁴ *Sweet Freedom* provided a good overview of the centrality of sexuality to second-wave activism, and unpacked the divisions within the movement caused by various approaches to topics like abortion or rape. Yet both are limited in scope, with no widespread

²¹David Bouchier, *The Feminist Challenge: The Movement for Women's Liberation in Britain and the United States* (Palgrave MacMillan, 1983).

²²Sarah F. Browne, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland c.1968–c.1979* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Dundee, 2009), 12.

²³Sheila Rowbotham, *The Past is Before Us: Feminism in Action Since the 1960s* (Pandora Press, 1989); Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation* (Picador Press, 1987).

²⁴Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 211.

exploration of the spectrum of British feminist campaigns and debates on sexuality, or detailed comparison with other European movements.

General histories of British women and feminism over the last century often contain chapters on the WLM. Examples include: Barbara Caine's *English Feminism 1780-1980* (1997); *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1999* by Martin Pugh; and *Women in Britain since 1900* by Sue Bruley.²⁵ Sociological studies include Paul Byrne's article 'The Politics of the Women's Movement' (1996) and April Carter's *The Politics of Women's Rights* (1988).²⁶ All present chronological accounts of the relationship between women, politics, and society, and women's fight to achieve equality. The structure and organisation of the movement are examined and prominent campaigns, such as abortion, highlighted. Such works are useful to place women's liberation in a broader historical context: sections on second-wave feminism are placed within a larger narrative of British feminist activism, which connects the WLM back to previous 'waves' of feminism, but limits the scope and depth of their analysis.

Questions over the application of 'wave theory' to feminist movements have occurred in many studies of second-wave feminism, particularly in Britain. The theory divides activism into sections, with the first the suffrage movements of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and the second the campaigns of the 1970s/80s. This theory has received substantial criticism, with Barbara Caine, for example, arguing against it in *English Feminism*, while in her thesis on the Scottish WLM, Browne describes it as 'highly problematic for the study of women's movements'.²⁷ Browne also argues that overemphasis on wave theory has hampered the study of the period 1918-1966, and resulted in a

²⁵Barbara Caine, *English Feminism 1780-1980* (Oxford University Press, 1997); Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1999* (Palgrave MacMillan, 1992); Sue Bruley, *Women in Britain since 1900* (St Martin's Press, 1999).

²⁶Paul Byrne, 'The Politics of the Women's Movement', *Parliamentary Affairs* 49 (1996): 55-70; April Carter, *The Politics of Women's Rights* (Longman, 1988). There are many significant works on the WLM from a social sciences perspective. See Joni Lovenduski and Vicky Randall, *Contemporary Feminist Politics: Women and Power in Britain* (Oxford University Press, 1993); Joni Lovenduski and Joyce Putshoorn, *The New Politics of Abortion* (SAGE Publications, 1986).

²⁷Browne, *Women's Liberation*, 3.

simplistic view of 1970s feminism.²⁸ Conversely, others, such as Donatella Della Porta, have pointed to a 'long wave' approach as more useful, arguing women's liberation campaigns carried on into the 1980s and 1990s.²⁹ It is certainly true that the wave theory can be reductive, and the period between the 'waves' contained women organising and campaigning, for example the work of the *Abortion Law Reform Association*, the *National Council of Women* or *La Ligue Patriotique des Femmes*.³⁰ As Jane Lewis has examined, there are links between the second-wave and earlier social reform movements.³¹ Many of these campaigns were on similar topics to the second-wave, took a radical and 'feminist' approach and politicized issues around women's health and the family that would be built on by feminists.³²

Despite this, I believe the wave theory remains relevant, although I would place its end point in the mid-late-1980s. As will be examined in this thesis, the 1970s – early-1980s saw a peak in campaigns, the development of a new kind of politics, and a similarity in approach between the WLM and MLF. Furthermore, women campaigning in the 1970s/80s in each country saw

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Donatella Della Porta, 'The Women's Movement, the Left, and the State', in *Women's Movements Facing the Reconfigured State*, eds. Lee Ann Banaszak, Karen Beckwith and Dieter Rucht (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 49.

³⁰For more information, see Caitriona Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928 – 64* (Manchester University Press, 2013). For an analysis of the connections between the second-wave and previous campaigns see Drude Dahlerup, 'Three Waves of Feminism in Denmark', in *Thinking Differently: A Reader in European Women's Studies*, eds., Gabriele Griffin and Rosi Braidotti (Zed Books, 2002), 341-351.

³¹Jane Lewis, 'From Equality to Liberation: Contextualising the Emergence of the women's liberation movement', in *Cultural Revolution? Challenge of the Arts in the 1960s*, eds., Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed (Routledge, 1992), 74-90.

³²See for example the campaigns of the *Abortion Law Reform Association* placed great emphasis on female autonomy. For more information, see Stephen Brooke, 'A New World for Women? Abortion law reform in Britain during the 1930s', *American Historical Review* 106 (2001): 431-459; id., 'The sphere of sexual politics: the Abortion Law Reform Association, 1930s to 1960s', in *NGOs in Contemporary Britain: Non-State Actors in Society and Politics since 1945*, eds., Nick Crowson, Matthew Hilton and James McKay (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 77-94.

themselves as part of a movement with a beginning and end. Although aware of previous female activism, for feminists in the 1970s/80s the term 'feminism' was connected to the women's liberation movement of the mid-late twentieth-century. In addition, by the mid-late-1980s, there had been a shift in the political culture within each country. The election of the first Socialist President under the Fifth Republic, François Mitterrand, in 1981, meant, as Claire Duchén writes, the MLF grappled with questions of 'strategy and power, alliances and co-option, autonomy and dependence'.³³ Conversely, the growth of 'Thatcherism' in the 1980s led some British feminists to re-evaluate the place of the WLM in Conservative Britain.³⁴ By this period the political and social contexts that launched second-wave feminism had changed, which contributed to the waning in campaigns. This can be seen in the terminology used in this thesis. As I subscribe to the wave theory I will be using the terms 'second-wave feminism' and 'women's liberation movement' more or less interchangeably when discussing Britain, although certain caveats apply in the French context. One is that, as will be seen in Chapter One, the group *Psychanalyse et Politique* (*Psych et Po*) (Psychoanalysis and Politics) trademarked the term 'Mouvement de libération des femmes' in 1979, which impacted what 'MLF' referred to. When referring to this iteration, the term '*Psych et Po* trademarked' will be used. In addition, as will be explored in Chapter One, the French movement contained multiple organised, individual groups, which saw themselves as fighting for 'women's liberation' and were aligned with the MLF. Therefore, for ease of understanding the groups *Choisir* and MLAC will be referred to by name, and included under the term 'second-wave feminism', but not 'MLF', even though I argue all three are part of the same movement.

In both Britain and France, many second-wave feminists were eager to develop a theoretical framework for their movement, and fresh forms of critical analysis. Feminist theory often developed alongside women's liberation but was not necessarily accepted by everyone involved. This was largely because, in

³³Claire Duchén, *Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterrand* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), viii.

³⁴See for example Beatrix Campbell, 'Feminist Politics after Thatcher', in *Working Out: New Directions for Women's Studies*, eds. Hilary Hinds, Ann Phoenix and Jackie Stanley (Routledge, 2003), 13-20.

contrast to Marxism, there was no individual or unifying ideology that every feminist identified with and which represented the movement as a whole. In Britain, the development of a theory around sexuality, for example, was important for radical/revolutionary feminists, and the works of Sheila Jeffreys were significant. Jeffreys – a revolutionary feminist – was one of the first to call for more theory within the WLM. As will be seen, revolutionary feminists maintained a strong focus on the relationship between sexuality and male violence, and developed theoretical ideas of ‘class sexuality’, which argued women as a class were oppressed by men. On the other hand, socialist feminists wanted to connect women’s liberation to wider left-wing politics. As one of the few Marxist texts to give detailed critiques of the domestic sphere and the relationship between men and women, Friedrich Engels’s *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* was significant. Engels’s work provided socialist feminists with a Marxist analysis of gender and female oppression.³⁵ Yet, as this thesis argues, some British socialist feminists found engaging with aspects of sexuality linked to men, like pornography and prostitution, problematic within a Marxist or socialist framework.

Feminist theory was often more successful in crossing borders than direct contact between movements. For example, as will be explored, the American WLM influenced both movements, and writers like Shulamith Firestone and Susan Brownmiller provided a theoretical base on sexuality for many in the WLM and MLF.³⁶ Arguably, it was after the movement had waned that feminist studies on sexuality moved from the activist phase examined in this thesis to academia, when broader feminist theories began to be published. Examples include Ann Ferguson’s *Blood at the Root: Motherhood, Sexuality and Male Dominance* (1989), Mary McIntosh and Lynne Segal’s *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate* (1992) and *The Politics of Reproduction*

³⁵Engels argued it was the development of a class society that led to the oppression of women. See Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Penguin Books, 1972 edition).

³⁶Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (William Morrow and Company, 1970); Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (Ballantine Books, 1993 edition). See also Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Doubleday, 1970).

by Mary O'Brien (1983).³⁷ Sheila Jeffreys also published various texts, including *The Sexuality Debates* (1987) and *Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution* (1990).³⁸ These works either presented a general overview of feminist theory on sexuality, or a specific theory on one topic. For example, O'Brien's book analyses the differences between male and female experiences of reproduction, and how this influenced political theory, while *Sex Exposed* is an edited collection of articles on the theoretical pornography debates. Others, including *Feminisms* (1998) by Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires or *Sexuality: A Reader* (1987), provide a summary of feminist theory around sexuality.³⁹ Texts on feminist theory provide information on theoretical approaches to sexuality using the movement as a base, but give no detailed information on feminist campaigns. They are useful for examining how the movement shaped social or psychoanalytical theory, and the development of feminist thought post-1970s, but are not as relevant for analysing feminist debates and campaigns during the activist phase of the movement, which is the aim of this thesis.

Although it has been slow to emerge, there has been a growth in academic texts on the WLM's approaches to sexuality in the last decade or so, although they contain little comparative analysis. Eve Grace Setch's 2000 PhD thesis, which looked at the London Women's Liberation Workshop and literary works inspired by the WLM, touched on feminist approaches to rape and abortion, while arguing against a clear demarcation between socialist and radical feminism.⁴⁰ Browne's 2009 doctoral thesis, recently adapted into a book, examines the Scottish movement, with a detailed chapter on the abortion campaigns and sections on lesbianism and separatism.⁴¹ The sociologist Lesley

³⁷ Ann Ferguson, *Blood at the Root: Motherhood, Sexuality and Male Dominance* (Pandora Press, 1989); Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh, eds., *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate* (Virago Press, 1992); Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (Pandora Press, 1983).

³⁸ Sheila Jeffreys, *The Sexuality Debates* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2013 edition); id., *Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution* (Spinifex Press, 2012 edition).

³⁹ Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, *Feminisms* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁴⁰ Eve Grace Setch, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Britain, 1969–1979: Organisation, Creativity and Debate* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2000).

⁴¹ Browne, *Women's Liberation*; id., *The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland c.1968–1975* (Manchester University Press, 2014).

Hoggart has written multiple accounts of the relationship between the *National Abortion Campaign* (NAC) and WLM, including *Feminist Campaigns for Birth Control and Abortion Rights in Britain* (2003), while Emma Healey and Shane Phelan examined the disagreements within the lesbian community on sadomasochism, and the rise of identity politics respectively.⁴² There have also been some recent studies on radical feminism, including the work of Jeska Rees and Finn Mackay.⁴³ However, both works have a limited focus, and only examine the sexuality campaigns strongest in radical and revolutionary feminist circles. Rees examines lesbian separatism, while Mackay focuses on male violence and the Reclaim the Night (RTN) marches.

Although there have been comparative works examining the second-wave between European countries, as will be seen below, there has been no detailed comparative work on the WLM and MLF. Arguably this is in part the result of limited language skills amongst British scholars writing about WLM, but it has meant both British feminist activism on sexuality, and any similarity to the French movement has been ignored.

Writings on the French Movement

In France, as in Britain, the first academic analyses of the MLF were written in the 1980s. Although a British academic, the historian Claire Duchen provided some of the significant early works, including *Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterrand* (1986) and *French Connections: Voices from the Women's*

⁴²Lesley Hoggart, *Feminist Campaigns for Birth Control and Abortion Rights in Britain* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2003); Emma Healey, *Lesbian Sex Wars* (Virago Press, 1996); Shane Phelan, *Identity Politics: Lesbian Feminism and the Limits of Community* (Temple University Press, 1991).

⁴³See for example Jeska Rees, 'A Look Back at Anger: The Women's Liberation Movement in 1978', *Women's History Review* 19:3 (2010): 337-356; id., *All the Rage: Revolutionary Feminism in England, 1977-1983* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Western Australia, 2007); Finn Mackay, *Radical Feminism: Feminist Activism in Movement* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2015). Mackay's work also connects the WLM to modern day feminist activism.

Movement in France (1987).⁴⁴ The latter is an edited collection of articles written by prominent feminists and groups, including Christine Delphy and Françoise Picq. It is useful in examining splits within the MLF between radical and socialist feminists, and provides various primary sources on radical lesbianism. In *Feminism in France* Duchen provides an overview of the various 'currents' in the MLF, and analyses the place of concepts of the feminine in the French feminist approach. Yet there is no widespread analysis of the spectrum of MLF activism on sexuality, with only the abortion campaign and lesbian separatism really examined in great detail.

Another influential author in the early stages of scholarly analysis on the movement was Françoise Picq. A prominent member of the MLF, Picq's *Libération des femmes: les années-mouvements* (1993), revised in a later edition in 2011, was the first detailed overview of the key campaigns and debates within the movement.⁴⁵ The book examines feminist approaches to sexuality in specific campaigns including rape, abortion, and prostitution, providing details of the disagreements between feminists, and Picq's own experiences. Like Duchen, though, there is more emphasis on the structure and organisation of the movement, and a limited scope of analysis on sexuality.⁴⁶

As in Britain, many narrative histories on women in France contain sections on second-wave feminism. Examples include *Women in France since 1789: The Meanings of Difference* by Susan K. Foley (1999); *Women and Politics in France 1958-2000* by Gill Allwood and Khursheed Wadia; and *Histoire du féminisme* by Michèle Riot-Sarcey (2010).⁴⁷ These are chronological

⁴⁴Duchen, *Feminism*; id., ed. and trans., *French Connections: Voices from the Women's Movement in France* (Hutchinson Education, 1987). Another significant curated primary sources collection is Claire Laubier, ed., *The Condition of Women in France: 1945 to the Present – A Documentary Anthology* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2003).

⁴⁵Françoise Picq, *Libération des femmes: les années-mouvements* (Éditions de Seuil, 1993); id., *Libération des femmes: quarante ans de mouvement* (Éditions Dialogues, 2011).

⁴⁶The 2011 revised edition also contains a section reflecting on the movement and comparing it to later feminist debates of the 1990s.

⁴⁷Susan K. Foley, *Women in France since 1789: The Meanings of Difference* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2004); Gill Allwood and Khursheed Wadia, *Women and Politics in France 1958-2000* (Routledge, 2000); Éliane Gubin et al., eds., *Le siècle des féminismes* (Les Éditions de l'Atelier, 2004); Michèle Riot-Sarcey, *Histoire du féminisme* (Éditions La Découverte, 2008).

accounts of the MLF and its role within twentieth-century French history. Feminist approaches to sexuality are not analysed in any great detail, but many of these publications do provide an overview of the organisation of the movement's emblematic campaigns such as abortion, and place the MLF in a broader historical context.

A significant area of historiography on the MLF are works on the 1968 protests, which examine either the relationships between men and feminists, or the impact the events had on the MLF's formation. Works include Julian Bourg's *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (2007); Michelle Zancarini-Fournel and Vincent Porhel's article '68, révolutions dans le genre?' (2009), and Robert Gildea, James Mark and Annette Warring's *Europe's 1968: Voices of Revolt* (2013).⁴⁸ The historian Kristina Schulz has also written several articles examining the impact of 1968 on the formation of the MLF.⁴⁹ Bourg offers useful analysis on the quarrels between lesbian feminists and gay liberation activists over sexuality, which led to the formation of lesbian activist groups. Zancarini-Fournel and Porhel's article provides a gender analysis of the events, and the strained relationship between many feminists and *soixante-huitards*, while contributors to Gildea's edited volume examines the problems some early feminists had with the way sexuality was approached within left-wing groups. This thesis argues that left-wing discussion on sexuality was influential for the MLF, and these works are significant in providing information on disputes between feminists and male activists over 'sexual liberation' and political campaigns. Yet they provide limited evidence on feminist activism on sexuality within women's liberation, or on how this compares to the WLM.

In a 2000 article the French theorist Christine Delphy criticised what she viewed as attempts by Anglophone feminists to reduce French second-wave feminism to abstract theory, disregarding any practical action, in order to

⁴⁸Bourg, *From Revolution*; Michelle Zancarini-Fournel and Vincent Porhel, '68, révolutions dans le genre?', *CLIO: Histoire, Femmes et Sociétés* 29 (2009): 7-15; Gildea, Mark, and Warring, *Europe's 1968*. See also Jackson, Milne, and Williams, *May 68*.

⁴⁹See for example Kristina Schulz, 'Echoes of Provocation: 1968 and the Women's Movements in France and Germany', in *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968 and 1989*, eds. Gerd-Rainer Horn and Padraic Kenney (Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 137-154.

provide an intellectual veneer to their own opinions.⁵⁰ Certainly Anglophone feminists often perceived the MLF as more intellectual and abstract, although arguably this owed more to stereotypes of French intellectuals, and a weak connection between British and French feminists, than desire for intellectual support. Many British feminists were influenced by French theorists such as Michel Foucault, Simone de Beauvoir, or Monique Wittig, and the idea that the French placed more importance on philosophical and theoretical debate than the British was held by many. In addition, there was a tendency by some British feminists to focus on feminist literary theorists working on *écriture féminine*,⁵¹ or other strands of psychoanalytical theory, more than the activism of the MLF.⁵² This was despite the fact that not all these writers explicitly described themselves as part of the MLF. The MLF did contain a strong psychoanalytical current, in *Psych et Po*, but the organisation was not discussed much by the WLM. Yet as this thesis argues, there was also a strong practical element to the MLF, including the activities of groups *Choisir* and MLAC, which received little attention at the time from the majority of British feminists. Moreover, there was a 'class struggle' current in the MLF, which followed similar theoretical patterns to British socialist feminists, with little interest in psychoanalytical theory. As will be seen in the following chapters, there was a lack of widespread direct contact and exchange between the two movements, and arguably this has helped reinforce the British idea of abstract theory as a shorthand for 'French feminism'.

As in Britain, it was following the decline of the activist phase of the MLF that feminist theory grew: theory based on a retrospective analysis of the movement's ideas and their evolution. *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*

⁵⁰Christine Delphy, 'The Invention of French Feminism: An Essential Move', *Yale French Studies* 97 (2000): 166-197. My research has not found any equivalent article on the MLF by British feminists.

⁵¹'Feminine writing'. The term used for writers who examine inscriptions of female difference and the female body in text. Prominent writers include Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray.

⁵²See for example the reviews of Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body* and *Les Guérillères* in *Spare Rib*, No.41, Nov 1975, 45; No.26, August 1974, 41. See also Ros Coward, 'Psychoanalysis and Feminism', *Spare Rib*, No.70, May 1978, 43-46, which examined psychoanalysis within French feminism.

(1981) by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, for example, is an edited collection of writings from various French feminist theorists including de Beauvoir, Cixous, Kristeva, Wittig, and Antoinette Fouque (the leader of *Psych et Po*).⁵³ In this collection, the writers build on the ideas and activism of a waning movement, using them to develop new academic theories, with articles on prostitution, sadomasochism, and female bodies. The editors stated that they aimed to provide more information on French feminist theory, yet they follow the dominant British view of French feminism, writing that these theories 'complement the more pragmatic and empirical approach of Anglo-American feminists with more of a focus on psychoanalytical theory', which ignores much of the practical and reformist elements of the MLF.⁵⁴

In the last decade and a half, there has been a growth in academic studies of the MLF and sexuality. Bibia Pavard has written on the abortion campaigns, with articles on French abortion groups and a 2010 thesis (published in 2012) *Contraception et avortement dans la société française (1956–1979)*, which provides a detailed analysis of feminist campaigns on abortion, placing them within the broader context of abortion rights in France.⁵⁵ Her book *Les éditions des femmes: Histoire des premières années 1972–1979* (2012) explores the campaigns and actions of *Psych et Po*, including their quarrels with others in the movement over prostitution and abortion, and the necessity of a reformist approach.⁵⁶ Pavard was granted access to the private

⁵³Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (Schoken Books, 1988). See also Diana Leonard and Lisa Adkins, eds., *Sex in Question: French Materialist Feminism* (Taylor & Francis, 1996).

⁵⁴Marks and de Courtivron, *New*, blurb.

⁵⁵Bibia Pavard, *Contraception et avortement dans la société française (1956–1979)* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Centre d'Histoire de Sciences Po, 2010); id., 'Genre et militantisme dans le Mouvement pour la liberté de l'avortement et de la contraception. Pratique des avortements (1973-1979)', *CLIO: Femmes, Genres, Histoire* 29 (2009): 79-96; id., *Si je veux, quand je veux: Contraception et avortement dans la société française* (Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012).

⁵⁶Bibia Pavard, *Les éditions des femmes: Histoire des premières années 1972–1979* (Broché, 2012). See also Jennifer L. Sweatman, *The Risky Business of French Feminism: Publishing, Politics and Artistry* (Lexington Books, 2014), which examines *éditions des femmes*, the publishing company of *Psych et Po*.

archives of the *Psych et Po* bookshop *des femmes* which makes her book much richer than many others, as it allowed her to provide an in-depth analysis of an organisation that has remained fairly secretive. The sociologist Lilian Mathieu has written extensively on the relationship between feminists and prostitutes' rights groups, including the book *La mobilisation de prostituées* (2001), which, although sociological in its analysis, provides detailed information on the campaigns on prostitution in the 1970s.⁵⁷ The historians Christine Bard and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel have also written on the movement. Alongside her work on women in twentieth-century France, Bard edited the book *Les féministes de la deuxième vague*, (2012), a collection of articles and personal recollections of the movement, while Zancarini-Fournel has written articles on the organisation and campaigns around abortion of the group MLAC.⁵⁸ Antoinette Fouque and *des femmes*, the publishing arm of *Psych et Po*, have also published several books on women's liberation, including *Génération MLF 1968–2008* (2008),⁵⁹ which offer a history of the movement from *Psych et Po*'s perspective. On the radical feminist current, Françoise Flamant's *À tiré d'elles. Itinéraires de féministes radicales des années 1970* (2009) is a collection of memoirs from various European feminists.⁶⁰

Among these recent works, Bard and Pavard were some of the first to truly attempt a historical analysis of the movement as, like Setch and Browne in the British context, they were not personally involved. In contrast to Britain, there have been some recent comparisons of the MLF with other European experiences. For example, Kristina Schulz's *Der lange Atem der Provokation: Die Frauenbewegung in der Bundesrepublik und in Frankreich 1968-1976* (2002) compared the movement's approaches to abortion in France and West

⁵⁷Lilian Mathieu, *La mobilisation de prostituées* (Belin, 2001).

⁵⁸Christine Bard, *Les féministes de la deuxième vague* (Broché, 2012); Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, 'Histoire(s) du MLAC (1973-1975)', *CLIO: Histoire, Femmes et Sociétés* 18 (2003): 2-9.

⁵⁹Antoinette Fouque, *Génération MLF 1968–2008* (des femmes, 2008).

⁶⁰Françoise Flamant, *À tiré d'elles. Itinéraires de féministes radicales des années 1970* (Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2009).

Germany.⁶¹ Flamant's previously cited work also provides testimonies from other European radical feminists and their approach to lesbianism. However, there has hitherto been no attempt at comparisons between the British and French women's movements, or their approaches to sexuality. This is surprising since sexuality was key to both movements, but any analysis has either been restricted to one topic, like abortion or lesbianism; or feminist theory on sexuality written after the activist phase had ended. As in Britain, it is arguably the result of limited language skills, but the marginal place of gender history in France is also a significant element.⁶² This has resulted in a restricted view of how British and French feminists approached sexuality, and the resulting impact on each movement. International comparisons strengthen our understanding of second-wave feminism as they help us see similarities and differences missed by looking at one individual movement, and place each country's activism in a wider international context. Consequently, this thesis aims to strengthen the scope of scholarship on each women's movement by taking a comparative perspective.

Themes and Issues

Feminists in both countries wanted to not only change the relationship of women to society, but also personal relationships which, as will be seen, often led to tensions over how certain elements of sexuality should be approached. Health and sex education manuals such as *The Joy of Sex* (1972) and *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1971), and articles including 'The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm' by American feminist Anne Koedt, alongside intimate group discussions, all contributed to the idea that in order to be liberated, women had to learn about their own body and sexuality, without any of the guilt or shame

⁶¹Kristina Schulz, *Der lange Atem der Provokation: Die Frauenbewegung in der Bundesrepublik und in Frankreich 1968-1976* (Campus Verlag, 2002). See also Gisela Kaplan, *Contemporary Western European Feminism* (Routledge, 2012), which compares Dutch and French feminism.

⁶²See 'Anne-Claire Rebreyend, 'Genre et histoire des sexualités au XXe siècle', *Historiens et Géographes* 394 (2006): 93-100.

previously associated with this.⁶³ As with the movement itself, there was no one analysis or theory of sexuality followed by all feminists.

As underlined, this thesis aims to provide a comparative analysis of feminist approaches to sexuality in Britain and France. The topics that will be examined are: abortion, lesbianism, pornography, prostitution and rape.⁶⁴ These were chosen as they were the issues of sexuality that received most focus by second-wave feminists, and consequently are the best examples to study to compare the scope and detail of feminist approaches to sexuality. Underpinning this analysis will be three main themes. The first – and most significant – is this comparison between the WLM and MLF. This thesis argues that the broad approach of each movement to sexuality was often very similar, but there were frequently differences in the implementation of ideas, whether due to different timeframes around legislation or contrasting structures of each movement. Using a comparative focus allows me to highlight how similar the women's liberation movements in each country were, and the extent to which contrasting social or cultural contexts shaped the campaigns and debates on sexuality differently. Examining each country's movement in relation to the other also highlights the strengths and weaknesses of each movement's approaches. For example, it is important to ask questions such as why French feminists were more willing to work with prostitutes' rights groups than the WLM, or were more likely to provide a class analysis of rape and pornography.

Within this broader comparative focus, this thesis will compare how feminist attempts to 'politicise' sexuality in each country shaped their campaigns

⁶³Alex Comfort, *The Joy of Sex: A Gourmet Guide to Lovemaking* (Quartet Books, 1976 edition); Boston Women's Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (Touchstone, 1971); Anne Koedt, 'The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm', in *Notes from the Second Year*, ed. New York Radical Women (Radical Feminist, 1970).

⁶⁴Although a significant issue within each movement, this thesis will not cover feminist discussions on contraception due to space constraints, and because many of the arguments cover similar areas to abortion. For more information on contraception in France see Pavard, *Contraception*; Jean-Pierre Bardet and Jacques Dupâquier, 'Contraception, les Français, les premiers, pourquoi?', *Communications* 44 (1986): 3-33. For Britain see Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex and Contraception, 1800–1975* (Oxford University Press, 2004); Lara V. Marks, *Sexual Chemistry: A History of the Contraceptive Pill* (Yale University Press, 2001).

and discussions, and the limitations of such tactics. By this I mean to explore how each movement balanced ensuring women's experiences and opinions on sexuality were heard and respected, with the desire to enact legal, political or social change. As highlighted, both movements were influenced by left-wing activism and ideas from the new 'permissive society'. Many socialist feminists on both sides of the Channel connected women's liberation and class theory, and analysed sexuality within a Marxist framework. Others wanted to unpick dominant ideas around sexuality, and re-examine it within a context of asymmetrical power relations between men and women, or male violence. In addition, each movement often took an identity politics approach, building collective action from individual personal experience, and arguing all women had a shared oppression. This was what made the movements so original and exciting, but making the personal political was often problematic. As will be examined, both the WLM and MLF grappled with connections between class politics, collective action, and sexuality; the impact of ideas of 'sexual liberation'; and how to deal with subjects where a woman's own personal experience contradicted dominant feminist ideas on sexuality. In both movements there were debates on the intersection between sexuality and class; power relations and violence; the right to a self-defined sexuality; and attempts to highlight oppressive representations of women's bodies. Furthermore, as will be seen in the chapters on abortion, prostitution, and rape, feminists in both countries also questioned the usefulness of a reformist approach, although this often contrasted in practice. Employing this perspective enables an exploration of the success of feminist campaigns and discussions on sexuality in both countries and how they compare.

Finally, within this context, feminist campaigns on each issue will be briefly compared. Each is large enough to have received a more detailed analysis by other scholars, but this thesis aims to provide a broader scope. Activism on sexuality differed not only between movements, but also from issue to issue. Abortion, for example, represented the apex of feminist campaigning in each country, while prostitution, pornography, or lesbianism were more divisive. Consequently, comparing feminist campaigns around sexuality allows an analysis of their positives and negatives, and a fuller comparison, than if limited to one topic. Placing sexuality at the heart of their campaigns was truly original,

and a comparative analysis of the feminist position will compare how the WLM and MLF broke new ground in discussing, defining, and analysing sexuality within a political and public context.

Methods and Sources

The time frame of this thesis (c.1970 – c.1983) was chosen because it was the period of the most active campaigning in both countries, but also when the activist phase began to wane. It was in the 1970s that mass campaigns on abortion in each country occurred, and when each movement was at its height. In her 2009 thesis, Browne ended her analysis in 1979, arguing it was when the WLM moved into a more fractious and divisive phase.⁶⁵ As acknowledged, moving the analysis into the early-1980s certainly shifts it into a period when both movements encountered great change. However, arguably this phase of the movement is equally as interesting and significant to examine as the supposed ‘peak years’, as it allows a deeper comparison of each movement’s approach to sexuality, and the timeframe chosen is the most relevant for the topics that will be examined.

1970 was the year often described as ‘year zero’ for women’s liberation in both countries, when it began to solidify as a movement and enter public consciousness. In Britain the first Women’s Liberation Conference was held at Ruskin College in Oxford, while in France a group of women the press named as from the ‘Mouvement de libération des femmes’ laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Paris, stating there was someone more unknown than him: his wife (See Figure 0.1).

⁶⁵Browne, *Women’s Liberation*, 26-27. Setch and Pavard also end their analysis in the late-1970s.



Figure 0.1: Image of the Protest at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Originally appeared in *L'Aurore*, August 27, 1970, 3.

By 1983, the peak of feminist campaigns on abortion or rape in each country had passed, and there was increasing debate about more divisive issues like pornography or prostitution, and consequently this date is an appropriate point to end this study. In addition, by this later point a more academic focus on women's liberation and sexuality was emerging. The theories in these works grew from ideas developed through the collectives and newsletters of the 1970s. As noted, although the distinction between the two groups was often blurred, it is the activism and debates on sexuality that preceded and engendered the scholarly theories of the 1980s and onwards that will be analysed. Compared to the 1970s when feminists formulated and discussed theory and action in the present, by the mid-1980s many began to feel the movement had already passed. In France for example, the book *Fini le féminisme* by the feminist group *Choisir* (To Choose) was published by 1984, which questioned whether the movement was irrevocably lost.⁶⁶ Increasingly,

⁶⁶ *Choisir* and Gisèle Halimi, eds., *Fini le féminisme: compte-rendu intégral du colloque international "Féminisme et socialismes"* (Éditions Gallimard, 1984).

too, those involved understood that the movement could not speak for all women, and challenges around issues such as race became more prominent, particularly in the WLM.⁶⁷

The majority of sources consulted are housed in The Women's Library in London and Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand in Paris, although other archives such as The Wellcome Library in London were also used. Organisations like the NAC or MLAC do not have their own archives, and their records and sources can be found in the above locations. As Browne notes, 'there have been few attempts by the wider historical academy to engage with material produced by the WLM', which has led to a 'hierarchical view of the movement', and this is equally true in the French context.⁶⁸ This thesis aims to challenge this and key sources include feminist magazines and periodicals such as *Spare Rib*, *des femmes* (women/some women) and *Le Torchon brûle* (The Burning Rag/Dishcloth), as well as newsletters and pamphlets from feminist groups and organisations like the NAC and *Choisir*.⁶⁹ The sources varied greatly, ranging from professionally published magazines like *Spare Rib* or *La Cause des femmes* (Women's Cause) to amateur hand-made pamphlets with drawings. Although very different, they all show women thinking, discussing, and forming their ideas on sexuality. Published primary material included edited collections of feminist articles and conference papers such as *No Turning Back: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement 1975–80* (1981), by the Feminist Anthology Collective, and *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes: Textes premiers* (2009), edited by Cathy Bernheim et al.⁷⁰ The tensions between the political and the personal at the heart of feminist sexuality debates can be seen

⁶⁷For more information on issues of race in the WLM see Natalie Thomlinson, 'The Colour of Feminism: White Feminists and Race in the Women's Liberation Movement', *History: The Journal of the Historical Association* 97:327 (2012): 453-475.

⁶⁸Browne, *Women's Liberation*, 10.

⁶⁹ A note on sources. Unlike in English, French titles do not follow a standard rule of capitalisation, and the surname of the author is written in capital letters when referenced. In this thesis, I have followed the rules for the writing of titles in French but have written the surnames of authors in the English style for ease of reading.

⁷⁰Feminist Anthology Collective, eds., *No Turning Back: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement 1975–1980* (The Women's Press, 1981); Cathy Bernheim et al., *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes: Textes premiers* (Éditions Stock, 2009).

in these sources; some were written for a broader audience or with a political aim in mind, while others were essentially just women talking amongst themselves. Although providing a fairly extensive overview of the various opinions and discussions within each movement, as the second-wave was a movement so intrinsically connected to personal experiences and emotions, the sources will perhaps never be truly representative of each movement's vibrancy. For example, the more professionally published magazines or collections were easier to obtain, while pamphlets or newsletters mainly survived in personal collections. This implies a pre-selection bias, which many have resulted in some sources being ignored. Nevertheless, the grassroots sources are an excellent base from which to build my research. I also consulted national newspapers, including *The Times* and *Le Monde*, which allowed me to provide a broader context for feminist discussions, and explore what those outside the movement thought of feminist campaigns.

Writing in 2000, Setch noted a large-scale oral history project around the British WLM had yet to be attempted.⁷¹ This is also true for the MLF. Since then more British oral testimonies have been collected, and although this thesis draws mainly on written sources, oral history interviews are used. Alongside a small number of oral testimonies I collected myself, I have been able to make use of interviews from various oral history projects. A notable one was the *Sisterhood and After Oral History Project*, conducted by the University of Sussex and the Women's Library. Over 60 testimonies were collected and are now housed at the British Library, and it is the first national oral history project of the WLM. These are extremely useful in providing a range of feminist views on sexuality, and how their activism impacted on their personal lives. For France, the collection *Around 1968: Activism, Networks, Trajectories* contains interviews from a collaborative project, involving historians across Europe. These interviews are slightly different from *Sisterhood and After* as they interviewed both men and women, and focused more on women's experiences of the events of 1968 than their role in the MLF. However, they are still helpful in shedding light on the background of various feminist activists, why they moved

⁷¹Setch, *Women's Liberation*, 18.

away from left-wing activism and into women's liberation, and the impact this had on their politics and life.

The use of oral history in social movement research has been examined by several scholars.⁷² As Kathleen M. Blee and Verta Taylor note, oral history interviews are useful in bridging the gap between individual memory and collective action in social movements, to help 'understand social contexts through stories of individual experiences and to comprehend experiences of the past through stories told in the present'.⁷³ The directors of the *Sisterhood and After* project support this in an article on their methodology. They rightly note that as the second-wave was built on a political understanding of the personal, oral history interviews allow researchers to examine the memories and emotions of individual women to great effect.⁷⁴ Yet, as they examine, there is an inherent paradox in studying a social movement through the stories of a few individuals, and as such one must be careful in ensuring personal testimonies and narratives do not overwhelm any analysis of broader feminist activism or historical accuracy.

Another theoretical concern is the intersubjectivity of oral history interviews.⁷⁵ As Abrams examines, feminist oral historians wanted to 'create an interview environment in which women could speak for themselves, permitting

⁷²See for example Kathleen M. Blee and Verta Taylor, 'Semi-Structured Interviewing in Social Movement Research', in *Methods of Social Movement Research*, eds., Bert Klandermans and Suzanne Staggenberg (University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 102; Lorenzo Bosi and Herbert Reiter, 'Archival Research and Oral History in Social Movement Research', in *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research*, ed., Donatella della Porta (Oxford University Press, 2014), 117-143.

⁷³Blee and Taylor, 'Semi-Structured Interviewing', 102.

⁷⁴Margaretta Jolly, Polly Russell and Rachel Cohen, 'Sisterhood and After: Individulism, Ethics and an Oral History of the Women's Liberation Movement', *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest* 11:2 (2012): 211-226. See also Polly Russell, 'Using Biographical Narrative and Life Story Methods to Research Women's Movements: Sisterhood and After', *Women's Studies International Forum* 35:3 (2012): 132-134.

⁷⁵This has been examined by many oral history theorists. See for example Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (Routledge, 2010), 54-78; Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader* (Routledge, 2015), 7-9; Thomas Lee Charlton, Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless, *Handbook of Oral History* (Rowman Altmira, 2006), 73-79.

the expression of 'honest voices'.⁷⁶ Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson note that 'oral history has always been created in relationships, between the interviewer and interviewee, and between memory sources and history makers'.⁷⁷ The tension between these two points can perhaps be seen in many of the interviews used in this thesis. Browne notes that it was 'remarkable how many of the respondents assumed that I was a feminist without me, on many occasions, declaring my political views', an experience I also encountered.⁷⁸ Although not explicitly described as such, the oral history projects cited above can be framed in this way, as it is clear that the interviewees and interviewers both saw the projects as an attempt to record a movement they believed was overwhelmingly positive. This does not mean that negative or controversial aspects of the movement were ignored, merely that it perhaps impacted the framing of certain points.

This concern about objectivity can be seen in other areas of my research, more specifically the difficulty in defining primary and secondary material. As Setch highlights, the majority of histories of the movement are characterised by a 'self-reflexivity', since they are either written by members of the movement, or collections of activist interviews and memoirs.⁷⁹ The same is true for the French context. As Abrams notes, the feminist research method has 'always rejected any pretence at objectivity. It is always motivated by an ideological position that seeks to explain and to understand women's subordination', and this is particularly true for these hybrid sources.⁸⁰ Participants of the movements have constructed the narrative in these testimonies, making many of the secondary sources extremely subjective. It also means that some areas or aspects of each movement are missed, as the authors understandably tended to focus more on their own 'current' of feminism. For this reason, texts from authors such as Rowbotham, Jeffreys, and Picq will be treated essentially as primary sources, with the caveat that they were written

⁷⁶Abrams, *Oral History*, 72.

⁷⁷Perks and Thomson, *Oral History Reader*, 7.

⁷⁸Browne, *Women's Liberation*, 35.

⁷⁹Setch, *Women's Liberation*, 8.

⁸⁰Abrams, *Oral History*, 71. See also Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland, *Feminist Methodology: Challenges and Choices* (SAGE Publications, 2002).

retrospectively. The year in which the text was published will be highlighted so it is clear how long after the primary events the author is writing. A distinction should be made between memoirs by Picq, Rowbotham and Cathy Bernheim, and more traditional secondary material like the works of Jeffreys. By this I mean although Jeffreys was involved in the WLM, her works do not contain as many personal memories as the other authors' work, although the same caveat of personal involvement applies.

A final methodological issue was the lack of named authors or dates on some pamphlets or articles. As many women's liberation groups were small, some of the material either has an anonymous author or only a first name attached. Often they had material from letters that also only contained a first name, which is not a major problem in analysing the primary material, but is important to bear in mind. One can glean some knowledge of these authors from their texts and the groups their work is attached to, such as for example, whether they classed themselves as radical or socialist feminists. Some of the periodicals or newsletters also occasionally lack specific dates or page numbers. Unless otherwise noted, all French sources will be presented in French with English translations by me.

Thesis Overview

The thesis is structured around the five issues mentioned: abortion, lesbianism, pornography, prostitution and rape. Chapter One is an introductory chapter, comparing the various currents and structures of the WLM and MLF. As this thesis focuses on feminist approaches to sexuality, there will be no detailed analysis of each movement, but this chapter will help provide a broader context for the sexuality campaigns.

Chapter Two deals with abortion, a subject discussed from the beginning of each movement. The campaigns for abortion on demand in both countries were the zenith of second-wave activism, received support from various other organisations including trade unions, and shared many ideas on female autonomy and sexuality. Yet they occurred in contrasting legal contexts, as abortion was already legal in Britain but not in France. Consequently, the campaigns are significant in comparing how feminists campaigned on a

personal issue in the political arena, and the extent to which contrasting legal contexts impacted on the progression of these campaigns.

Chapters Three and Four look at lesbianism and pornography respectively. Both were significant in the development of the feminist approach to sexuality. Yet unlike abortion they were subjects with no clear-cut political or legal aims to shape feminist activism, and were often more divisive. Although sharing many ideas across the two movements, the impact of discussions on lesbianism and pornography differed between the WLM and MLF, as will be seen. Examining the feminist approach to lesbianism enables a comparison of tensions on the relationship of sexual behaviour to collective action; while pornography dealt with the consequences of the 'permissive society' and ideas of 'sexual liberation' on each movement, a significant issue that occurs throughout this thesis.

Chapters Five and Six examine prostitution and rape. The former is included because it facilitates an exploration of the strains within each movement on the limits of bodily and sexual autonomy; the latter because feminist analysis of the subject was influential on the broader social conversation. There were similarities in the discussions in each movement on prostitution, with questions about whether a shared identity as women was sufficient to support prostitute activism. Yet there were contrasts between the relationship of the WLM and MLF to prostitutes' rights groups, which impacted on each movement in different ways. For rape, both movements were influenced by American feminist theories, yet, as with abortion, contrasting legal and social contexts shaped feminist campaigns in each country differently, as will be explored. Examining prostitution and rape also allows a comparison of how feminists approached topics of sexuality that dealt with men, a significant issue for many feminists.

Ultimately this thesis aims to compare how second-wave feminists discussed and campaigned on sexuality in Britain and France. It will explore their attempts to bring political activism into the most intimate areas of women's lives, and compare the impact of national factors on each movement, and the extent to which these factors shaped the activism of the WLM and MLF in contrasting ways.

Chapter One: Mapping the Movement

Early Days

As noted, the women's liberation movements in Britain and France had similar origins, coming from a disgruntlement with broader left-wing politics and ideas of 'sexual liberation'. Although there was a lack of direct contact between the two movements, perhaps as a result of language differences or each movement's focus on national issues, both were influenced by the American WLM.¹ There were likewise similarities in the structures of early feminist groups. In her analysis of the American WLM, Jo Freeman argues that 'masses alone don't form social movements' and 'emerging spontaneous groups' were essential to the spread and progression of the movement, and this was equally true in the British and French contexts.² Both movements began with small, informal groups of women sharing personal grievances and experiences, in a supportive environment. In Britain, one of the earliest was the Women's Liberation Workshop, which was founded in 1969, and made-up of five Greater London Women's Liberation groups.³ Similar groups were founded in cities across the country, as more women became aware of this fledgling movement.

¹See for example Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation* (Picador Press, 1987), 11-15; Jacqueline Feldman, 'De FMA au MLF. Un témoignage sur les débuts du mouvement de libération des femmes', *CLIO: Femmes, Genres, Histoire* 29 (2009): 195-196; Christine Delphy, 'Les origines du Mouvement de libération des femmes', *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* 16-18 (1991): 140; Simone de Beauvoir, 'France: Feminism – Alive, Well and in Constant Danger', in *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology*, ed. Robin Morgan (Feminist Press at CUNY, 1984), 229. All highlight the influence of the American WLM.

²Jo Freeman, 'The Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement', *American Journal of Sociology* 78:4 (1973): 792-811.

³Tufnell Park, Peckham Rye, Notting Hill, Belsize Lane, and Islington. The Women's Liberation Workshop would go on to publish *Shrew*, one of the first second-wave feminist periodicals. For more information on the activism of the WLW see Eve Grace Setch, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Britain 1969–1979: Organisation, Creativity and Debate* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of London, Royal Holloway, 2000), 25-70.

In France, groups met for comparable discussions, some mixed-sex and some women-only.⁴ One of the first was the mixed group *Féminin Masculin Avenir* (FMA) (Feminine Masculine Future),⁵ which Zancarini-Fournel argues 'constitue le socle généalogique du MLF' (represents the genealogical base of the MLF).⁶ Questions on the place of mixed-groups within women's liberation surfaced in the abortion debates, as the *Mouvement pour la Liberté de l'Avortement et de la Contraception* (MLAC) (Movement for Abortion and Contraception Freedom)⁷ and National Abortion Campaign (NAC)⁸ were both mixed (see Chapter Two). Despite this, in both countries the women's liberation movement consisted predominately of non-mixed groups. There was a historical tradition of women only groups in both countries, such as *La Ligue Patriotique des Femmes* and the *National Council of Women*. However, these were often formed because women were not allowed in the male equivalents. The second-wave was distinctive in taking an identity politics approach, and basing collective female action on the personal lives and experiences of women.

Social Profile

Demographically, the WLM and MLF were also alike. As Beuchler notes, new social movements – including the women's movement – predominately drew from 'the new middle-class, elements of the old middle-class and groups

⁴For more information on female groups pre-1970 see Sylvie Chaperon, 'La radicalisation des mouvements féminins Français de 1960 à 1970', *Vingtième Siècle: Revue d'histoire* 48 (1995): 61-74; Delphy, 'Les origines', 137-148.

⁵Founded by Jacqueline Feldman and Anne Zelensky-Tristan. Originally named *Féminisme Marxisme Avenir*. For more information on the group, see Feldman, 'De FMA au MLF', 193-203. Other groups included *Petites Marguerites*, *Polymorphs Perverses*, and *Oreilles Vertes*. For more information, see Claire Duchén, *Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterrand* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 1-27.

⁶Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, 'Les féminismes: des mouvements autonomes?', in *Le siècle des féminismes*, eds. Éliane Gubin et al. (Les Éditions de l'Atelier, 2004), 227-238.

⁷A mixed-sex organisation created in 1973 to campaign for the legalisation of abortion. The group had links with other organisations including *Groupe Information Santé*, a group of doctors who campaigned for the legalisation of abortion.

⁸A mixed-sex organisation formed in 1975, to defend the 1967 Abortion Act against a number of Private Member's Bills, which wanted to restrict abortion rights.

outside the labour market', such as housewives or students.⁹ In addition, Sara M. Evans defines the events of 1968 as a 'generational revolt', as 'sons and daughters of elites and the growing middle-classes challenged the authority of their parents' generation on every level', which arguably can also be applied to the women's liberation movements in Britain and France.¹⁰ In both, feminists tended to be in their early twenties to mid-thirties, white, university-educated, and middle-class.¹¹ This may explain why both movements campaigned on issues previously considered apolitical, that were relevant to the young women who made up the movement. There was little or no focus, for example, on the menopause, retirement, or age discrimination and gender, which limited who became involved and implies there were limits to the movement representing a universal female experience.

In both countries, there had been a rise in women attending universities, where many feminists first became politically involved.¹² Many were young mothers who would bring their children to meetings, and questions on motherhood and female identity circulated in both movements. Feminists were also original in disentangling sex from motherhood when discussing abortion,

⁹Steven M. Beuchler, 'New Social Movement Theories', *The Sociological Quarterly* 36:3 (1995): 441-464.

¹⁰Sara M. Evans, 'Sons, Daughters and Patriarchy: Gender and the 1968 Generation', *The American Historical Review* 114 (2009): 331-347. See also Alice Echols, 'Nothing Distant about It: Women's Liberation and Sixties Radicalism', in *Women Transforming Politics: An Alternative Reader*, eds. Cathy J. Cohen, Kathleen Bones, and John C. Tronto (New York University Press, 1997), 456-477.

¹¹Jane Lewis, 'From Equality to Liberation: Contextualizing the Emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement', in *Cultural Revolution? The Challenge of the Arts in the 1960s*, eds. Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed (Routledge, 1992), 96. For France see Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, 'Histoire(s) du MLAC (1973-75)', *CLIO: Histoire, Femmes et Sociétés* 18 (2003): 241-252; Delphy, 'Les origines', 137-148; Duchén, *Feminism*, 1-27.

¹²For more information on the rise of female university students see Carol Dyhouse, *Students: A Gendered History* (Routledge, 2006); Martin Klimke, '1968: Europe in Technicolour', in *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History*, ed. Dan Stone (Oxford University Press, 2012), 243-245, where Klimke points to the rise of university attendance as contributing to May 1968.

which led to new modes of thinking on female sexuality.¹³ The movements tended to be strongest in urban spaces, perhaps because of larger and more socio-economically diverse populations, although activism between cities often differed. Leeds, for example, had strong radical/revolutionary feminist campaigns, while campaigns in Lyon and Grenoble were frequently based around local issues like the Lyon prostitute strike in 1975 (see Chapter Five), and the defense of a Grenoble doctor accused of performing illegal abortions in 1973 (see Chapter Two).¹⁴

Despite contrasting religious cultures between the two countries, the role of religion within women's liberation was not as dissimilar as might be expected. In France the MLF was weaker in more religious, rural areas, although whether this was due to religion or education levels is debatable.¹⁵ Some French feminists did pay attention to broader national views on religion in their campaigns. For example, in the abortion campaign the group *Choisir*¹⁶ tried to convince the wider public by pointing to prominent Catholics who supported them (see Chapter Two). In Britain, feminists also discussed Catholicism in the context of abortion, but it was weaker, with some articles in *Spare Rib* on Catholic attitudes to abortion, or convent education.¹⁷ In an article examining

¹³For more information on the WLM and motherhood see Sheila Rowbotham, *The Past is Before Us: Feminism in Action Since the 1960s* (Pandora Press, 1989), 59-105; Ann Ferguson, *Blood at the Root: Motherhood, Sexuality and Male Dominance* (Pandora Press, 1989); Liz Heron, 'The Mystique of Motherhood', in *No Turning Back: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement 1975–80*, eds. Feminist Anthology Collective (The Women's Press, 1981), 139-142. For France see Duchén, *Feminism*, 49-67; *Les Chimères, Maternité esclave* (Union Générale d'Éditions, 1975).

¹⁴This refers to the arrest of Dr. Annie Ferrey Martin, a Grenoble based doctor and Family Planning activist accused of performing illegal abortions. This led to protests and campaigns by feminists, particularly the group *Choisir*.

¹⁵Duchén, *Feminism*, vii.

¹⁶Organisation created in 1971 by Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halimi to protect from prosecution the signatories of 'Manifeste du 343 salopes' who publicly declared that they had had an abortion. Halimi (b.1927) is a Tunisian born lawyer and writer, of mixed Muslim-Jewish background. She became heavily involved in significant court cases around abortion and rape through *Choisir*. For more information, see her memoir *Le Lait de l'oranger* (Pocket, 2001). *Choisir* published a periodical *La Cause des femmes*.

¹⁷For example, Michèle Roberts, 'Hung Up on the Crucifix', *Spare Rib*, No.54, January 1977, 10.

connections between religion and the WLM, Browne mentions some individual Christian feminists, but neither country had a strong Christian feminist movement.¹⁸ Arguably this was due to the demographics of the women involved, and, in France, the wider cultural presence of *laïcité*.¹⁹

Browne also notes that religion played both a direct and indirect role in turning women towards feminism. As with all aspects of second-wave feminism and sexuality, an individual woman's own formative experiences were significant. For example, in her memoir *Paper Houses*, the author Michèle Roberts discussed the impact her religious upbringing had on her views of sexuality, and the connection between her rejection of religion and involvement with the WLM.²⁰ Similarly, in a 2007 interview, Picq discussed how her father had 'un goût pour l'anticléricalisme' (a taste for anti-clericalism), while her mother was 'beaucoup plus traditionnelle' (a lot more traditional), and had been educated in a convent school.²¹ Picq described how 'chaque fois qu'il y a eu des crises sur la laïcité, mes parents étaient opposés' (every time there was a crisis over secularism, my parents were on opposite sides [of the argument]).²² More significantly, Picq noted she always took her father's side in these arguments, and so possessed an anti-clerical and anti-religious viewpoint from an early age, which was the base for her later political involvement.²³ Arguably, in a movement based on politicising the personal, religion was merely one of

¹⁸See Sarah F. Browne, 'Women, Religion and the Turn to Feminism: Experience of Women's Liberation Activists in Britain in the Seventies', in *The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianization in North America and Western Europe, 1945–2000*, eds. Nancy Christie and Michael Gavreau (University of Toronto Press, 2013), 84–98; Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crises of the 1960s* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁹*Laïcité* (Secularism) refers to the separation of church and state within France under the 1905 *loi concernant la séparation des Églises et de l'État*. For an analysis of *laïcité* and the rights of women see Florence Rochefort, 'Laïcité et droits des femmes: quelques jalons pour une réflexion historique', *Archives de philosophie du droit* 48 (2004): 95–107.

²⁰Michèle Roberts, *Paper Houses: A Memoir of the 70s and Beyond* (Virago Press, 2007).

²¹Françoise Picq interviewed by Robert Gildea, 27/04/07. Part of the oral histories collected by Robert Gildea, James Mark and Annette Warring, eds., *Europe's 1968: Voices of Revolt* (Oxford University Press, 2013). Transcript available at <http://around1968.modhist.ox.ac.uk>.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

many topics that influenced women's involvement with second-wave feminism, rather than a nationwide pattern.

Structuring Women's Liberation

1970 was the year when women's liberation in both countries solidified into a recognisable movement. In Britain, the first 'National Women's Liberation Movement Conference' was held, while in France the first meeting of the MLF took place at the University of Vincennes.²⁴ Significantly, in comparison to first-wave feminism, there was a lack of widespread international structures, or International Congresses within women's liberation. As Freeman notes in the context of the American WLM, 'from its radical roots it inherited the idea that structures were always conservative and and confining, and leader, isolated and elitist.'²⁵ Freeman also correctly describes how an unstructured approach 'encourages group formation but discourages individual diversification', which would be one of the most significant problems for both movements.²⁶ It also arguably contributed to the limited direct contact between the British and French movements, as there were few opportunities to meet feminists from other countries.

Allowing women to describe their own experiences was important, and in the WLM led to the creation of consciousness-raising (cr) groups. Cr had started in the United States and aimed to help women realise how they were oppressed by society.²⁷ The theorist Alberto Melucci points to 'collective identity' as integral in the formation and progression of the new social movements, rejecting class as a tool of analysis. Melucci and others have pointed to collective identity as an alternative to structural interests in explaining why people mobilized, arguing that it is created in 'submerged networks' of

²⁴ Michèle Riot-Sarcey, *Histoire du féminisme* (La Découverte, 2010), 99.

²⁵ Jo Freeman, 'The Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement', *American Journal of Sociology* 78:4 (1973): 792-811.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ For more information on consciousness-raising see Sue Bruley, 'Women Awake: the experience of consciousness-raising', in *No Turning Back*, 60-67; Kathie Sarachild, 'Consciousness-raising: a radical weapon', in *Feminist Revolution*, eds. Redstockings (New York, 1975).

small groups of people, who are then motivated to take collective action.²⁸ Carol Mueller has applied this theory to the American WLM, where she argued that early cr groups and meetings were essential in the development of the women's movement.²⁹ Groups would often discuss topics not previously considered 'political', like motherhood, sexuality, or marriage, to show participants how pervasive this oppression was. Not everyone within the movement practiced cr, and it was arguably stronger in the WLM than the MLF, where psychoanalysis was more common, because of the influence of the group *Psych et Po*.³⁰ For example, when describing women's involvement in feminism, the French feminist Anne Zelenksy-Tristan noted that 'un certain nombre de féministes ont fini par s'allonger sur un divan' (a number of feminists ended up lying on the therapist's couch).³¹ Although different in application, with cr often leading women to practical action or campaigning, psychoanalysis and cr arguably played similar roles within each movement. Both focused on rediscovering the self, and aimed to show how women were constrained by dominant modes of thinking on sexuality or femininity.

As noted, I agree with Delphy that the Anglo-American stereotype of French feminism as overly intellectual was erroneous. Admittedly, *Psych et Po* did advocate a more abstract theoretical framework, similar to the stereotypes rejected in Delphy's article. In addition, although there were some attempts to develop feminist institutions by *Féministes Révolutionnaires* (Revolutionary

²⁸Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society* (Temple University Press, 1989); Cristina Flesher Fominaya, 'Collective Identity in Social Movements: Central Concepts and Debates', *Sociology Compass* 4:6 (2010): 393-404; Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper, 'Collective Identity and Social Movements', *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 283-305.

²⁹Carole Mueller, 'Conflict Networks and the Origins of Women's Liberation', in *New Social Movements: From Ideology*, eds. Enrique Larana, Hank Johnston and Joseph R. Gusfield (Temple University Press, 1994), 234-264.

³⁰On psychoanalysis and feminism see Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Harmondsworth, 1975); Elizabeth Wright, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* (Blackwell, 1992); Janet Sayers, *Sexual Contradictions: Psychology, Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Tavistock, 1986).

³¹Anne Zelenksy-Tristan, *Histoire de Vivre: Mémoires d'une féministe* (Calmann-Lévy, 2005), 66; Duchén, *Feminism*, 35.

Feminists), these were arguably weaker than in Britain, where the Rape Crisis Centre was a more significant element of feminist campaigning.³² Despite this, there was a notable amount of distinctive practical campaigns by the French movement. For example, *Choisir's* reformist approach and MLAC's performing of illegal abortions demonstrated that French feminists could be pragmatic (see Chapter Two). Equally, there was considerably more emphasis on working within the judicial system in rape campaigns by the MLF, than in the WLM (see Chapter Six). It is perhaps fairer to say that French feminists had more room for theory than the WLM. Practical activism was significant for many, but the theoretical discussions still had a strong impact.

Despite these similarities, there were distinct differences between the structure of the British and French movements. The former had a stronger conference structure; the latter more independent, 'organised' groups. As noted, the first National Women's Liberation Conference was held in Oxford in 1970, and following its success, eight more conferences were held across the country between 1971 and 1978.³³ Arguably the fact that the WLM started with a conference may explain the meaningful role they would go on to play in British second-wave feminism, as unlike the MLF, the WLM saw annual meetings as significant to the unity and identity of the movement.

At the 1970 conference, the first four of the 'Seven Demands' of the WLM were agreed upon, and sexuality played a role in these from the beginning. The demands were equal pay, equal education and opportunity, extensive nursery provision, and free contraception and abortion on demand.³⁴ Two more demands, 'Legal and Financial Independence for All Women', and 'An End to Discrimination against Lesbians/The Right to a Self-Defined Sexuality' were adopted at the 1974 conference, with the latter being split into two at the 1978 conference.³⁵ A demand calling for the freedom for all women from 'the threat or use of violence or sexual coercion', and the end to laws which perpetuated 'male dominance and aggression to women' was also added

³²Duchen, *Feminism*, 16.

³³Skegness in 1971; Manchester and London in 1972; Bristol in 1973; Edinburgh in 1974; Manchester in 1975; Newcastle in 1976; London in 1977 and Birmingham in 1978.

³⁴Paul Byrne, 'The Politics of the Women's Movement', *Parliamentary Affairs* 49 (1996): 55-70.

³⁵See Appendix I: 'The Seven Demands'.

at the 1978 conference. Presenting the right to a self-defined sexuality and access to abortion as feminist demands demonstrated that sexuality was a core topic for the WLM. It also perhaps contributed to divisions in the WLM, as feminists discussed whether feminist campaigns remained true to the demands, unlike in the MLF (see Chapter Three).

Although lacking frequent collective conferences, unlike the WLM, the French second-wave contained more 'organised' groups, which were hierarchically-structured like other left-wing groups. Both *Choisir* and MLAC, for example, had chapters in various cities across France, and the former employed a president, and group leaders. The connection of regional groups to the 'central bodies' in Paris varied. Some were semi-autonomous, independently campaigning on regional issues they believed were important. All campaigned under the broader national umbrella of their organisation. *Psych et Po* were also more structured, with a more 'traditional' leader in Antoinette Fouque. Arguably, the existence of such groups was significant in shaping the French movement. It meant groups often campaigned autonomously, or tangentially alongside each other, rather than collectively as was more common in the WLM, and there were frequent disagreements over whether a group was part of the MLF or not. For example, as will be seen, although *Choisir* received support from other feminist groups, the organisation often had an uneasy relationship with the MLF, seeing themselves as separate, leading to disagreements over their campaigns on abortion and rape.

Currents within the British Movement

Many of the early histories of the WLM divide it into binary divisions of socialist and radical feminism.³⁶ Tensions between radical and socialist feminists are commonly seen as coming to a head at the 1978 Birmingham conference, over lesbian separatism, which many see as the beginning of the decline of the movement (see Chapter Three). As Browne notes many of these authors, such as Rowbotham, Coote and Campbell, were themselves socialist feminists, and so 'there has been little in-depth and sympathetic coverage of the revolutionary

³⁶See for example Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 9-48; Barbara Caine, *English Feminism 1780–1980* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 264.

and radical feminist agenda'.³⁷ The works of Rees and Mackay have mediated this recently but these are the exceptions to the rule. As Browne argues, radical feminism is described 'in opposition to socialist feminism, as extremist, with a concentration on sexuality and lifestyle, naming men as the enemy. Socialist feminism is implicitly defined as more reasonable, recognising other forms of oppression, such as class and race'.³⁸

Like their French equivalents, British socialist feminists saw their campaigns as building on previous progressive campaigns and theory; making it more supportive of women's experiences.³⁹ They rejected the separatist and essentialist arguments made by radical/revolutionary feminists, instead arguing that there were structural reasons for women's oppression. Many socialist feminists were unhappy with the focus on male violence against women by radical/revolutionary feminists, and felt alienated from 'a political creed, which cited husbands, lovers, fathers, sons, comrades and friends as the enemy'.⁴⁰ For them, the WLM was not 'a sanctuary from male domination; rather a means of combative engagement with it, and the struggle for socialism should be transformed through the movement, not superseded'.⁴¹ As will be seen, unlike the French movement, this perhaps explains why some British socialist feminists found issues of sexuality such as lesbianism, pornography, and prostitution problematic. Arguably, they were often reluctant to truly engage with what such topics revealed about relationships between men and women and found them harder to connect to class theory. British socialist feminists were also generally more interested in a reformist approach than developing theories on sexuality. For example, the NAC was more closely aligned with socialist feminists than radical, and the Rape Crisis Centres (1973), and Women's Aid Refuges (1974) were other notable examples of practical initiatives. All represented the moving of a subject of female shame and embarrassment from the shadows to public attention – a key element of feminist campaigning.

³⁷Sarah F. Browne, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland c.1968–c.1979* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Dundee, 2009), 15.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 31.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 32.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 33.

The other main current of thought was radical feminism, within which I would include revolutionary feminism.⁴² Finn Mackay has argued that there were differences between radical and revolutionary feminism, particularly in the late-1980s. Mackay points to a revolutionary feminist critique of radical feminism as turning into a 'cult of woman' or 'cultural' or 'lifestyle' feminism as one of the most significant.⁴³ Despite this, Mackay (like many other writers on the WLM) often classes radical and revolutionary feminism together as one current, perhaps because of the similarities the two groups had in comparison to socialist feminism. Revolutionary feminism was in a sense a 'breakaway' group from radical feminism formed after the 1977 conference paper by Sheila Jeffreys⁴⁴ called 'The Need for Revolutionary Feminism – Against the Liberal Takeover of the Women's Liberation Movement'. In her paper, Jeffreys argued revolutionary feminism was needed within the WLM for two reasons: first, the 'liberal takeover' of the movement and second, the 'grave lack of theory in the movement'.⁴⁵ Just as with *Psych et Po*, the importance for Jeffreys and, by extension, many revolutionary feminists was in formulating a feminist theory of male oppression. Yet, while Fouque viewed her work as building on previous male psychoanalytical theory, Jeffreys and revolutionary feminists wanted to create a new form of theory based on a radical feminist analysis of gender relations.

⁴²For more detailed information on revolutionary feminism see Jeska Rees, *All the Rage: Revolutionary Feminism in England, 1977–1983* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Western Australia, 2007); id., 'A Look Back at Anger: The Women's Liberation Movement in 1978', *Women's History Review* 19:3 (2010): 337-356.

⁴³Finn Mackay, *Radical Feminism: Feminist Activism in Movement*, (Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 55-67.

⁴⁴Jeffreys was an extremely influential and controversial revolutionary feminist. Many of her works apply a revolutionary feminist analysis to issues around sexuality, including prostitution and lesbianism. Notable works include *The Sexuality Debates* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2013 edition); id., *Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution* (Spinifex Press, 2012 edition); id., *The Lesbian Heresy: A Feminist Perspective on the Lesbian Sexual Revolution* (Spinifex Press, 1993).

⁴⁵Sheila Jeffreys, 'The Need for Revolutionary Feminism', paper presented at 1977 Women's Liberation Conference, London. Can be accessed at <http://finnmackay.wordpress.com/articles-i-like/the-need-for-revolutionary-feminism-by-sheila-jeffreys-1977/> Accessed December 13, 2015.

I would agree with Nickie Charles that an identity politics approach was often stronger amongst British radical/revolutionary feminists than socialist, as the former were more concerned with inequalities between men and women, than class discrepancies between working and middle-class women.⁴⁶ This can be seen in Jeffrey's paper. There were similarities between the radical feminist currents in each country, including the definition of men and masculinity as a 'class' that oppressed women.⁴⁷ Jeffreys argued that two class systems existed within society: 'one is the economic class system based on the relationship of people to production, the second is the sex-class system, based on the relationship of people to reproduction'.⁴⁸ For Jeffreys and revolutionary feminists it was the latter system that oppressed women, 'through my fear on the streets at night, the eyes, gestures and comments of males in every contact with them'.⁴⁹ All elements of the relationship between men, women, and society should be changed and 'as long as women's sights are fixed on closeness to men the ideology of male supremacy⁵⁰ is safe'.⁵¹ For women to be free they must seize control of their bodies, and harness female collective power, not let it be tainted by mainstream politics through the involvement of men. For example, at the National WL Conference in November 1972, radical feminists claimed a change in the political system would not change 'the way men behaved in pubs, in the home, in the bedroom, in the office, or on a darkened street at night'.⁵² In common with *Psych et Po*, who often displayed little interest in campaigning for concrete institutional change, this meant radical/revolutionary feminists were more dismissive of reformism, as they believed overturning 'male supremacy' was more important than working within existing political structures. For

⁴⁶Nickie Charles, 'Feminist Practices', in *Practicing Feminism: Identity, Difference, Power*, eds. Nickie Charles and Felicia Hughes-Freeland (Routledge, 2013), 3.

⁴⁷'Sex-class' described the power all men held over all women as the dominant class. This was an extremely influential theory within radical feminism. For more information, see Deborah L. Madsen, *Feminist Theory and Literary Practice* (Pluto Press, 2000), 153-156.

⁴⁸Jeffreys, 'Revolutionary Feminism'.

⁴⁹Ibid.; Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 29.

⁵⁰Revolutionary feminist term, similar to the term 'patriarchy' and referred to the system by which men as a class oppress women. See Madsen, *Feminist Theory*, 155.

⁵¹Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 29.

⁵²Ibid.

example, some radical feminists believed it was more important to challenge the gender relations that underpinned prostitution, than debate the efficacy of regulation or abolition (see Chapter Five).

Despite this, bodily and sexual autonomy as the impetus for political campaigns was not exclusive to the radical faction. Many other feminists believed in the mantra: 'power over our bodies, power over our lives'.⁵³ Rowbotham described this perception of women's bodies as 'not unalterable; it is one way in which the personal is political'.⁵⁴ Where British radical feminists differed from socialist feminists was their emphasis on male violence and oppression as the most significant struggle women faced, and their belief that women should fight back at a biological level. For example as Coote and Campbell noted in 1987, radical feminism advocated not just the 'elimination of male privilege but of the sex distinction itself'.⁵⁵ As with *Psych et Po* in France they believed masculinity as a concept should be eradicated; connecting it to the class struggle merely supported female oppression. This perhaps explains why women became involved with radical/revolutionary feminism, as they believed socialist feminists were ignoring the impact 'male supremacy' could have on women's lives. For example, in her article on revolutionary feminism, Rees describes how one woman left 'the Left' because:

[T]hey didn't see that violence against women was at all important. It wasn't an important issue in any way. What was really important was issues around production. Work, childcare, those kinds of issues, but definitely not violence against women.⁵⁶

The progression of radical/revolutionary feminism within the WLM can be seen in the 'Seven Demands', as traditionally socialist ideas like equal pay and job opportunities were placed alongside male violence against women. Significant groups from this current include *Women Against Violence Against Women*⁵⁷ (WAVAW), and *Women Against Rape* (WAR). WAVAW campaigned

⁵³Rowbotham, *The Past*, 61.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 27.

⁵⁶Rees, 'A Look Back', 342.

⁵⁷Formed in 1980 following an Anti-Violence Conference in Leeds.

on issues related to sexual abuse and violence, including pornography, prostitution, and child abuse, and were interested in developing a theoretical analysis of sexuality. WAVAW and other radical feminists were often the first to protest at rape trials, because of the centrality of combating male oppression to their feminism (see Chapter Six). WAR were an offshoot of the *Wages for Housework Campaign*, an international organisation founded by Selma James in 1972, who argued that housework played a significant role in capitalist production and as such should be properly remunerated. WFH were not universally liked by those in the WLM who believed the group were too radical or focused their activism on useless targets. As a result, groups aligned with them like WAR and the *English Collective of Prostitutes* (ECP)⁵⁸ were often mistrusted by association.

Recent historiography has argued against a clear distinction between the two groups, emphasising that 'division was integral to the movement from its inception'.⁵⁹ Moreover, looking at the London WLW, Setch argues that change 'might have represented growth, not demise'.⁶⁰ It is certainly true that socialist and radical/revolutionary currents in the WLM often shared members or worked collectively, and there were individuals who did not view themselves as aligned to either. However, arguably this division is not as simplistic as Setch and Browne contend. There was enough ideological difference between the currents to warrant a distinction. For example, as early as her 1966 article on the proto-feminist groups that would lead to the WLM, Juliet Mitchell treated socialist and radical feminism as two distinct groups, and provides an overview of what she argues are the main ideologies of each.⁶¹ Moreover, some of the more radical texts on male violence or sexuality often came from self-identified revolutionary or radical feminists, such as Leeds Revolutionary Feminist's 1979 pamphlet questioning compulsory heterosexuality. Self-identified socialist feminists did see their socialism and feminism as intertwined in ways not shared by others, and focused on structural reasons for male oppression.

⁵⁸Prostitutes' rights group formed in 1975. See Chapter Six for more information.

⁵⁹Setch, *Women's Liberation*, 17. See also Browne, *Women's Liberation*, 15.

⁶⁰Setch, *Women's Liberation*, 17.

⁶¹Juliet Mitchell, 'Women: The Longest Revolution' first published in *New Left Review*, No.40, Dec 1966. Can be found in Juliet Mitchell, *Women's Estate* (Pelican, 1971), 75-122.

In addition, Setch's argument that change represented growth, is questionable, at least for the wider WLM. The WLM placed women's experiences at the forefront of political activism. Yet not all these experiences were the same. For example, many radical/revolutionary feminists were also lesbians, and as Rees notes, consequently 'had very different priorities to those identified within the socialist feminist critique of "the family," for them, feminism was about learning to live without men'.⁶² What women expected from women's liberation started to diverge, contributing to fragmentations in the movement, and waning in campaigns. Arguably although 'feminism' as a concept and ideology continued into the late-1980s, the WLM did not.

Currents within the French Movement

As in Britain, there were different 'tendances' (currents) in the MLF. As mentioned, there were also more organised, independent groups than in the WLM, each of which can generally be placed within a specific current.⁶³ Jane Jenson highlights the three main currents as revolutionary feminism, syndicalist feminism, and egalitarian feminism.⁶⁴ However, I would agree with Duchén's definition of the three currents as 'lutte de classe' (class struggle), *Psych et Po*, and non-aligned feminism. Jenson's definition downplays the influence of *Psych et Po* and those groups who were less interested in an overarching theory. In practice, distinctions between the various currents were often blurred. As Picq noted: 'At the beginning, there was a great deal of flexibility and everyone participated in her own way in the collective events [...] it didn't matter who initiated and organised them'.⁶⁵ This means defining the MLF can be problematic. Picq, for example, defines it simply as women-only groups, which

⁶²Rees, 'A Look Back', 340.

⁶³For an overview of the French feminist groups mentioned in this thesis and their place within the movement see Appendix II.

⁶⁴Jane Jenson, 'Representations of Difference: The Varieties of French Feminism', in *Mapping the Women's Movement: Feminist Politics and Social Transformation in the North*, ed. Mònica Threfall (Verso, 1996), 76.

⁶⁵Françoise Picq, 'The MLF: Run for your Life', in *French Connections: Voices from the Women's Movement in France*, ed. and trans. Claire Duchén (Hutchinson Education, 1987), 24.

excludes MLAC and *Choisir*.⁶⁶ Although accepting the significance of women-only groups to the identity of the French movement, as noted in the Introduction, subscribing to the wave theory means *Choisir* and MLAC will be classed as part of French second-wave feminist activism. Even though they often campaigned autonomously, they saw themselves as pushing for women's liberation, following a theoretical framework similar to others in the MLF, as seen in their campaigns.

Like the WLM, 'class struggle feminists' in France similarly came to the movement through broader left-wing political activism, and saw themselves as both socialist and feminist. Arguably, it was this current that was strongest at the start of the movement. For example, writing in 1993, Picq linked the origins of second-wave feminism to broader struggles against racism and imperialism, stating that 'en luttant contre notre propre oppression nous les rejoignons dans leur combat' (in fighting against our own oppression, we are joining them in their fight).⁶⁷ However, this did not equate to a smooth relationship between feminists and male activists, and there were tensions between the two groups over sexual violence, racism, and imperialism following several rape trials (see Chapter Six).

The resemblances in the origins and ideas of the early women's movements on each side of the Channel may explain the similarities between French and British socialist feminists. Women and men alike were seen as being manipulated by capitalism, and the struggle for gender equality should not be separated from the broader one against capitalism. For example, the communist collective *Elles voient rouge* (They [women] see red)⁶⁸ argued that a revolutionary feminist⁶⁹ 'recognises the simultaneous oppression and exploitation exercised in conjunction by patriarchy and capitalism', and

⁶⁶Picq, *Libération*, 14.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 15.

⁶⁸In the title 'to see red' has the implication both of communist/left-wing connotations, and anger.

⁶⁹Note on terminology: unlike in Britain the term 'revolutionary feminist' (féministe révolutionnaire) referred to a feminist who was more aligned with socialism/Marxism than radical feminism.

consequently women should 'fight on two fronts'.⁷⁰ Women must fight capitalism, alongside fighting the 'sexist ideology and practices in all power systems'.⁷¹

In both Britain and France, socialist feminists often felt uncomfortable over contradictions between their socialist and feminist identities. Within the MLF some radical feminists saw socialist feminists as apologists for men, while within left-wing parties their demands were given little attention.⁷² In addition, as in Britain, 'class struggle' feminists often grappled with how to argue for gender equality without alienating men, and how to maintain their identity as individuals within a broader collective. For example, in an article in the feminist periodical *Le Torchon brûle*, socialist feminists were accused of never saying 'I' and talking only about the masses.⁷³ As second-wave feminism progressed, women often found it harder to deal with these contradictions, which, as in Britain, led to some to stop working in leftist groups.⁷⁴ Although French class struggle feminists were initially focused on economic issues, their involvement in second-wave feminism soon led them to develop a class-based analysis of sexuality. For example, the Marxist feminist group *Les Pétroleuses* (Female fire-raisers)⁷⁵ connected economic inequality and abortion or prostitution. Unlike the WLM, where radical feminist theory on sexual violence was arguably more

⁷⁰Elles Voient Rouge, 'Feminist and Communist' (1979) in Duchén, *French Connections*, 118.

⁷¹Ibid., 119.

⁷²For more information on second-wave feminism and Marxism see *Choisir* and Gisèle Halimi, eds., *Fini le féminisme?: compte-rendu intégral du colloque international "Féminisme et socialismes"* (Éditions Gallimard, 1984); Courant G collective, 'Patriarchy in the Parti Socialiste' in Duchén, *French Connections*, 12-124; 'Féminisme: quelles politiques?', *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* 2 (1981): 3-8; Éliane Viennot, 'Féminisme et partis politiques: une greffe impossible', *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* 2 (1981): 34-46; Carol Ehrlich, 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Can it be saved?', in *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, ed. Lydia Sargent (Black Rose Books, 1981), 109-135.

⁷³Duchén, *Feminism*, 29.

⁷⁴Viennot, 'Féminisme', 34-46.

⁷⁵Their name comes from the apocryphal story of female supporters of the Paris Commune who committed arson against government buildings. It can also be used to describe a woman who passionately or violently defends her political ideals. The group was formed in 1974 and published a feminist periodical also called *Les Pétroleuses*.

influential, *Les Pétroleuses* and others also developed a Marxist analysis of rape (see Chapter Six).

The second current was women associated with the group *Psychanalyse et Politique*. Originally part of a women's study group at the University of Vincennes, *Psych et Po* was an organisation with no clear equivalent within the WLM, although as noted, some of their ideas overlapped with British radical/revolutionary feminist theory. Led by the charismatic Antoinette Fouque, the group arguably had the strongest theoretical position of any feminist group in either country. They took a psychoanalytical approach to women's oppression, focusing on the construction of concepts like 'woman' or 'femininity'.⁷⁶ Consequently their aim was to undermine masculinity, the 'phallus in the head' of women. Like British radical feminists, they did this through the creation of female-only spaces including their bookshop, publishing company, magazine, and group meetings. However, unlike in Britain their strong theoretical background meant they psychoanalysed each individual woman who joined; to help her 'understand how she has been made a misogynist [...] and work towards total elimination of these elements, freedom from any dependence on men and male thinking'.⁷⁷ Fouque would often psychoanalyse women in the group personally, which led to other feminists viewing the group as lacking individual opinions and acting as her mouthpiece.⁷⁸ Many viewed the group as a cult: for example, the feminist Nadja Ringart published an article in

⁷⁶For more information on Antoinette Fouque see 'Interview with Antoinette Fouque', in Duchén, *French Connections*, 50-55; Alain Touraine, Charles Juliet and Roger Dadoun, eds, *Penser avec Antoinette Fouque* (éditions des femmes, 2008); Christophe Bourseiller and Antoinette Fouque, *Qui êtes-vous, Antoinette Fouque: Entretiens avec Antoinette Fouque* (Éditions François Bourin, 2009). For more information on *des femmes*, see Bibia Pavard, *Les éditions des femmes: Histoire des premières années, 1972–1979* (L'Harmattan, 2005); Jennifer L. Sweatman, *The Risky Business of French Feminism: Publishing, Politics and Artistry* (Lexington Books, 2014).

⁷⁷Duchén, *Feminism*, 35.

⁷⁸Picq interviewed by Gildea, 27/04/07. See also, Françoise Barret-Ducrocq interviewed by Robert Gildea, 2008. Part of the oral histories collected by Gildea, Mark and Warring, eds., *Europe's 1968*. Transcript available at <http://around1968.modhist.ox.ac.uk>

1977 in the newspaper *Libération* called 'La naissance d'une secte' about *Psych et Po*.⁷⁹

Other feminists also disagreed with *Psych et Po*'s focus on an essentialist discourse and their emphasis on female difference.⁸⁰ Like many British socialist feminists, materialist feminists, such as Christine Delphy,⁸¹ argued instead that feminists should focus on the impact of material conditions and structures like capitalism and patriarchy on women's oppression.⁸² The radical feminist journal *Questions Féministes* (QF) (Feminist Questions) disagreed with *Psych et Po*'s focus on female difference, arguing it was merely inequality by another name, and still led to the inferiority and oppression of women.⁸³ Women in both movements discussed whether women's oppression was structural, and whether men and women were inherently different. However, the debates were arguably not as significant to the WLM as *Psych et Po*'s unyielding focus on the issue, and their actions within the movement was an element which uniquely impacted the MLF.

⁷⁹Nadja Ringart interviewed by Robert Gildea, 5/09/07. Part of the oral histories collected by Gildea, Mark and Warring, eds., *Europe's 1968*. Transcript available at <http://around1968.modhist.ox.ac.uk>

⁸⁰For more information on the debates on female difference within the MLF see Dominique Fougeyrollas-Schwebel, 'Controverses et anathèmes au sein du féminisme français des années 1970', *Cahiers du genre* 39 (2005): 13-26; Duchén, *Feminism*, 67-82. For broader theory on female difference see the works of Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous.

⁸¹Christine Delphy was one of the first to undertake a materialist analysis of gender relations and was read by many Anglophone feminists. Notable works included *L'ennemi principal: Economie politique du patriarcat* (Syllepse, 2013); id., *Un universalisme si particulier: féminisme et exception française (1980-2010)* (Syllepse, 2010); Christine Delphy and Diana Leonard, 'A Materialist Feminism is Possible', *Feminist Review* 4 (1980): 79-105. The latter article is a reply to criticism of Delphy's work in Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh, 'Christine Delphy: Towards a Materialist Feminism', *Feminist Review* 1 (1979): 95-106.

⁸²For more information on materialist feminism see Diana Leonard and Lisa Adkins, eds., *Sex in Question: French Materialist Feminism* (Taylor & Francis, 1996); Rosemary Hennessey, *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse* (Routledge, 1993).

⁸³Emmanuèle de Lesseps, 'Le fait féminin: et moi?', *Questions Féministes* 5 (1979): 4.

These disagreements were compounded when *Psych et Po* trademarked the term 'Mouvement de libération des femmes' as their own property in 1979.⁸⁴ As would be expected other feminists vehemently opposed this. Trademarking the term meant other women were legally barred from speaking as part of the movement, and any comment from the *Psych et Po* trademarked MLF was seen as representing all women in the movement.⁸⁵ It also meant that the entire history and definition of the movement was controlled by *Psych et Po*. Writing in 1991, Delphy noted the trademarking of the term meant:

les vraies actrices du mouvement sont dépossédées de ce qu'elles ont fait, donc d'elles-mêmes. Ce n'est pas seulement l'histoire qui est falsifiée. L'imposture, la supercherie, se doublent d'une injure grave aux personnes, dont l'identité – car être féministe fait partie de notre identité – est ainsi niée.

(the real players of the movement are robbed of what they created, and therefore robbed of themselves. It is not only the history of the movement that has been falsified. This deception and trickery are doubly serious because of the grave insult it inflicts on individuals whose identity – for being feminist is part of our identity - is thereby denied).⁸⁶

This led to considerable fracturing of the movement. Jennifer L. Sweatman notes that the dominant historiographical view of *Psych et Po* as a divisive cult which split the MLF, has led to a lack of focus on the significance of their literary works.⁸⁷ Although certainly true, despite this, their trademarking of the term was extremely significant, as it meant from 1979 onwards, unlike in Britain, two women's liberation movements existed alongside each other: one 'official' and

⁸⁴Duchen, *Feminism*, 32; See also Association du Mouvement pour les luttes féministes France and Simone de Beauvoir, *Chroniques d'une imposture: du mouvement de libération des femmes à une marque commercial* (Association du mouvement pour les luttes féministes, 1981).

⁸⁵*Psych et Po* were also critical of the American WLM. For an interesting analysis on how they used this criticism to define themselves as the sole French women's liberation movement see Judith Ezekiel, 'Anti-féminisme et anti-américanisme: un mariage politiquement réussi', *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* 17:1 (1996): 59-76.

⁸⁶Christine Delphy, 'Les origines du Mouvement de libération des femmes', *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* 16-18 (1996): 137-148.

⁸⁷Sweatman, *Risky Business*, 5-6.

the other 'unofficial', which often contributed to angry disagreements, and impacted on how feminists defined the MLF.

As Duchen notes, the other significant current was non-aligned feminism.⁸⁸ This is defined as groups who discussed and campaigned on specific topics, often autonomously outside of the MLF. Non-aligned feminists did not formally identify with either of the two currents, although occasionally their viewpoints and actions mirrored other groups'. A high importance was often placed on the individuality of each woman. For example, in the very first edition of the periodical *Le Torchon brûle*, the group *Féministes Révolutionnaires*⁸⁹ wrote that they wanted to 'encourage all women to take charge of their own lives, think for themselves, take initiatives, be creative, while refusing to integrate into the society we live in'.⁹⁰ MLAC, who were aligned with the MLF, played a large role in the abortion campaigns, while *Féministes Révolutionnaires* campaigned on abortion, rape, and prostitution. As will be explored below, *Choisir* played a significant role in feminist activism on abortion and rape, and their reformist legal approach had no real equivalent in the WLM. Arguably non-aligned feminism was rooted in individual actions, not abstract theory, and tended to react to local or national events, such as the so-called 'Bobigny Trial' around abortion (see Chapter Two), or the prostitute strike in Lyon (see Chapter Five). The lack of a central focus also meant that such groups were more susceptible to splits and divisions.

In both countries, divisions appeared when what individual women expected from the movement diverged. However, in France, the divisions were also based on legal and group divides. This shaped the MLF in ways that often differentiated it from the British equivalent, as women tended to campaign within specific group channels, and the divisions following *Psych et Po*'s trademarking meant there was more questioning of how to define the MLF, and fractured relationships between groups.

⁸⁸Duchen, *Feminism*, 40.

⁸⁹Non-aligned group formed in 1970. Became more fragmented in 1974, when individual women began to diverge in their actions. See Duchen, *Feminism*, 16. for more information.

⁹⁰'Le Torchon brûle' No.5, 1973 in Duchen, *Feminism*, 40.

Conclusion

Although obviously not an exhaustive overview of each movement, this chapter has shown that despite differing cultural backgrounds, and lack of widespread direct contact and exchange, second-wave feminism in Britain and France had many similarities. Both movements consisted of women with similar social backgrounds, who wanted to create a new women-only movement that would make the personal political, over an analogous timeframe. It was the tide of progressive activism and political debate of the period that influenced the WLM and MLF, and may explain why their movements were often alike. Both also had comparable currents: those who saw their feminism as building on class politics; others who focused on female difference and male oppression and violence. Yet despite these broad resemblances, there were often differences in the structure and role of groups in each movement. The conference structure and 'Seven Demands' meant the WLM had a 'feminist' view on sexuality to refer to, while the significant number of MLF-aligned groups often led to groups like *Choisir* campaigning outside of the MLF. In addition, the actions and theoretical background of *Psych et Po* divided the movement. These points show that, despite parallels in ideas, each movement had specific national factors that shaped second-wave feminism in each country, and which impacted the form and progression of campaigns and debates, as will be explored in the following chapters.

Chapter Two: Abortion

One of the most significant campaigns on sexuality by British and French feminists was abortion. For both movements the right to abortion represented bodily autonomy and sexual freedom for women, and presented the opportunity to discuss a subject considered personal and taboo openly in public. They had comparable themes in their discussions, including: the relationship between abortion, class, and sexuality; motherhood; and female autonomy. However, these campaigns and discussions occurred in different legal contexts. Whereas the WLM campaigned to defend access to abortion, and convince the public that a pre-existing law should remain; the MLF aimed to convince people that abortion should be decriminalised. This chapter will compare some of the significant events and discussions within each movement, including the relationship between women's liberation and the medical community; abortion and class politics within the National Abortion Campaign (NAC); the influence of anti-abortion arguments; criminality and abortion; and the 'Manifeste de 343' and so-called 'Bobigny Trial'. This will help explore the extent to which differing legal contexts and national factors impacted feminist discussions on abortion, and what this revealed about the relationships between women's liberation, sexuality, and political activism.

The Legal Situation in Britain and France

Oral contraceptives had been available in both countries since the 1960s. In Britain the Pill had been legalised in 1961 and in France the Loi de Neuwirth (Neuwirth Law) legalised all forms of contraception and advertising of contraception in 1967. However, abortion legislation was different.

In Britain, abortion up to 28 weeks had been decriminalised under the 1967 Abortion Act, one of the most liberal pieces of abortion legislation at the time.¹ The decision to perform an abortion had to be agreed upon by two doctors who were satisfied that several conditions had been met.² The Act was passed following a rise in concern over backstreet abortions, not a belief in female sexual autonomy. It was framed as a class issue. Press reports at the time highlighted the horrors experienced by, and deaths, of working-class women undergoing backstreet abortions, and voiced worries over illegitimacy rates and lack of stable families. As Lesley Hoggart notes, those to be helped included: 'women from deprived or demoralised backgrounds; those whose families were already of an abnormal size and young girls'.³ This explains the moralistic tone

¹Other examples of liberal legislation in these years include The Sexual Offences Act (1967), which decriminalised male homosexuality in England and Wales, and The Divorce Reform Act (1969), which instigated 'no fault divorce'. Historians such as Brown point to these as significant in the 'liberalisation' of sexuality and social politics that occurred in this period. Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Routledge, 2014), 269.

²Abortion Act 1967

Medical termination of pregnancy.

'(1) Subject to the provisions of this section, a person shall not be guilty of an offence under the law relating to abortion when a pregnancy is terminated by a registered medical practitioner if two registered medical practitioners are of the opinion, formed in good faith --

(a) That the pregnancy has not exceeded its twenty-fourth week and that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated, of injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman or any existing children of her family; or

(b) That the termination is necessary to prevent grave permanent injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman; or

(c) That the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk to the life of the pregnant woman, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated; or

(d) That there is a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped'.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/87/section/1/enacted>

Accessed December 13, 2015.

Despite differing legal systems this Act did apply to Scotland, although not Northern Ireland, where abortion remains illegal. For more detailed information on the Act and legal history of abortion in Britain see Peter de Cruz, *Comparative Healthcare Law* (Routledge, 2013), 83-102.

³Lesley Hoggart, 'Feminist Principles meet Political Reality: The Case of the National Abortion Campaign', <http://www.prochoiceforum.org.uk/al6.php> Accessed December 13, 2015.

of the Act, with its focus on the mental and physical health of the woman, threats to the foetus, and reliance on the permission of the doctor.⁴ Within the Act, the default position for women was motherhood: women had to prove why they should not have children. As will be seen, the framing of motherhood as a choice was a significant element of feminist discussion on abortion in both countries. The discussion before the passing of the Act also meant arguments on class and the legalisation of abortion had already been publicly discussed by the 1970s in Britain, unlike in France. There had been various campaigns by women's groups including the National Council of Women and the Abortion Law Reform Association on the issue, but again, they generally focused on class rather than female autonomy.⁵ The impact of the Act can be seen in Figure 2.1. Post-1967 there was an increase in the number of abortions performed in England and Wales, peaking in 1973.

Year	No (%) of married women	No (%) of single. Widowed, divorced or separated women	No (%) under 16
1968	10, 497 (44)	13,065 (56)	553 (2.3)
1969	24,403 (45)	30,261 (55)	1231 (2.2)
1970	38,096 (44)	48,345 (56)	1822 (2.1)
1971	55,358 (43)	71,288 (57)	2618 (2.1)
1972	69,327 (43)	90,362 (57)	3319 (2.1)
1973	71,426 (43)	95,535 (57)	3660 (2.2)
1974	66,761 (41)	95,970 (59)	3948 (2.4)
1975	54,590 (39)	84,930 (61)	4006 (2.8)
1976	49,008 (38)	80,183 (62)	3835 (3.0)

⁴National Abortion Campaign and The National Council for Civil Liberties, *Abortion – The Evidence: A Report from the Tribunal on Abortion Rights* (National Council for Civil Liberties, 1977).

⁵For more information see Stephen Brooke, "A New World for Women?" Abortion law reform in Britain during the 1930s', *American Historical Review* 106 (2001): 431-59; id., 'The sphere of sexual politics: the Abortion Law Reform Association, 1930s-1960s', in *NGOs in Contemporary Britain: Non-state Actors in Society and Politics since 1945*, eds., Nick Crowson, Matthew Hilton and James McKay (Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 77-94; Caitriona Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928 – 64* (Manchester University Press, 2013).

Figure 2.1: Details regarding legal abortions performed in England and Wales.⁶

Conversely, by this period, abortion in France was still illegal under the 1920 Abortion Law. This prohibited abortion and contraception, allowing for the prosecution of all those who aborted or helped a woman procure an abortion.⁷ The fear of depopulation has a notable history in France, and often shaped the way abortion was discussed, unlike in Britain, where politicians worried more about the the impact of abortion on the working-class.⁸ For example, as Henry Berger notes, the Act had been passed to 'combattre la depopulation' (combat depopulation) as a result of these fears that France's population was dropping rapidly, and questions of citizenship and motherhood often circulated in feminist discussions on abortion, as will be explored.⁹

Historically, the penalties for abortion in France were fines and imprisonment from one to five years, which were stiffened by the Vichy government.¹⁰ It even led to the guillotining of an abortionist in 1943.¹¹ The penalties were usually heavier for unqualified abortionists or 'faiseuses d'anges'¹² but by 1974 the legislation was mostly symbolic, with no sentences passed. Following vocal campaigns, abortion was finally legalised in 1975, under the Loi Veil (Veil Law). Any woman in a 'situation of distress' could ask a

⁶T.L.T Lewis, 'Legal Abortion in England and Wales 1968-78', *British Medical Journal* 280 (1980): 295-296.

⁷Claire Duchen, ed. and trans., *French Connections: Voices from the Women's Movement in France* (Hutchinson Education, 1987), 25.

⁸On the fears of depopulation in the 1920s see Richard Tomlinson, 'The Disappearance of France 1896-1940: French Politics and the Birth Rate', *The Historical Journal* 28 (1985): 405-415. On the pronatalist movements of the 1980s see Leslie King, 'France Needs Children: Pronatalism, Nationalism and Women's Equity', *The Sociological Quarterly* 39 (2008): 33-52.

⁹Henry Berger, *L'avortement: Histoire d'un débat* (Flammarion, 1975), 33. See also Anne Cova, 'La maternité, un enjeu dans le premier XXe siècle', in *Le siècle des féminismes*, eds. Éliane Gubin et al. (Les Éditions de l'Atelier, 2004), 203.

¹⁰'Vichy France' is the name given to the Philippe Pétain-headed French state from 1941-1944 under German occupation.

¹¹Françoise Picq, *Libération des femmes: les années-mouvements* (Éditions de Seuil, 1993), 24.

¹²This was the term used in France for women who practiced illegal abortions. The literal translation is 'angel-makers'.

doctor for an abortion before the end of the tenth week of pregnancy.¹³ The law had fewer restrictions on applying for termination than the British equivalent, but it still depended on the opinion of the doctor, who could refuse to carry out the termination, and the fact that women had to rely on the opinions and whims of doctors was a shared concern of the WLM and MLF.

Britain

The Context of Rights

In Britain, following the 1967 Act, there was an increase in concern about the supposed ubiquity and ease of obtaining an abortion.¹⁴ There were two main attempts to change the 1967 Act: The White Bill (1975) and The Corrie Bill (1979). Both sought to limit the upper time limit to 20 weeks, while The White Bill aimed to stop 'abortion on demand', and foreign women coming to Britain to obtain abortions.¹⁵ The Corrie Bill wanted to change the criteria so abortion would be harder to obtain for 'social reasons',¹⁶ and to break the financial link between abortion counselling services run by charities and abortion clinics,

¹³Loi Veil, 1975. Section 1 - Art.L.162-1–

'La femme enceinte que son état place dans une situation de détresse peut demander à un médecin l'interruption de grossesse. Cette interruption ne peut être pratiquée qu'avant la fin de la dixième semaine' (A pregnant woman whose pregnancy places her in an extremely precarious situation of distress can ask a doctor for a termination. This can only be performed before the end of the tenth week of pregnancy).

http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jo_pdf.do?id=JORFTEXT000000700230

Accessed December 13, 2015.

Distress was not defined under the law, and the woman herself was allowed to be the sole judge of whether she was in distress or not. For more information on this and the legal history of abortion in France see de Cruz, *Comparative Healthcare*, 438-439.

¹⁴Staff Reporter, 'Doctor's racket warning on abortion epidemic', *The Times*, February 6, 1969. See also Colin Francome, *Abortion Freedom: A Worldwide Movement* (Allen & Unwin, 1984), 40.

¹⁵For more information, see ALRA, *Fight This Bill: A Commentary on The Corrie Bill and What You Can Do* (Abortion Law Reform Association, 1979).

¹⁶This was generally used to refer to situations where neither the woman's nor foetus' life was at risk.

following reports in the press of organisations allegedly forcing women to have abortions.¹⁷ Much of the retrospective and historiographical analysis of the WLM and abortion focuses on these Bills, with writers like Rowbotham, Browne or Lesley Hoggart highlighting how they impacted on feminist activism.¹⁸

Unlike the French context, both pro-and anti-abortion campaigns were shaped in response to these Bills. The largest anti-abortion group in Britain was the *Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child* (SPUC), formed following the 1967 Act by three professors of medicine and a Labour MP, all of whom believed abortion was morally or religiously wrong. As Browne notes, the organisation had branches across Britain and campaigned by distributing leaflets and lobbying MPs around elections.¹⁹ SPUC argued that pro-abortion groups 'made an abortion sound like a benediction, the pulling of a tooth at the most', and that the sterilisation of women who did not want children rather than abortion was the answer to the 'unwanted baby syndrome'.²⁰ There was a strong emotionalism in many of the British anti-abortion arguments. For example, the book *Babies for Burning* (1974) by two *News of the World* journalists, claimed to be an exposé of the various immoral actions of medical practitioners and the 'abortion industry'.²¹ Examples included forcing an abortion on a woman who was not pregnant, and the supposed use of early stage fetuses in cosmetics production. The claims were consequently proved to be false, but the book influenced those who perceived legalisation of abortion as the start of wider moral degradation. James White, the instigator of the White

¹⁷Annabell Ferriman, 'Social Forces: Both sides of the abortion argument', *The Times*, February 6, 1980.

¹⁸Sarah F. Browne, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland c.1968–c.1979* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Dundee, 2009), 208-210; Sheila Rowbotham, *The Past is Before Us: Feminism in Action Since the 1960s* (Pandora Press, 1989), 67, 73; Hoggart, 'Feminist Principles'.

¹⁹Browne, *Women's Liberation*, 210-212.

²⁰Staff Reporter, 'State abortion on demand feared', *The Times*, January 25, 1967. Some feminists did discuss sterilisation. See for example, Sue O'Sullivan, 'Sterilisation', *Spare Rib*, No.33, March 1975, 10-13.

²¹Michael Litchfield and Susan Kentish, *Babies for Burning: The Abortion Business in Britain* (Serpentine Press, 1974).

Bill, for example, claimed it was 'his main source of inspiration regarding the abortion issue'.²²

Although the cultural impact of Catholicism was stronger in France than in Britain, in both countries Catholic beliefs on conception was behind much of the opposition to feminist abortion campaigns. SPUC was connected to the Catholic Church, and drew much of its political support from British Catholics.²³ Alongside other anti-abortionists, SPUC focused on what they saw as the 'murder' of the foetus, drawing on a theological definition of when life began.²⁴ For example, in an oral history interview conducted in 2009 the Scottish feminist Anne-Marie McGenoch remembers abortion being discussed in the Catholic school she attended: 'they showed us pictures of, you know, Spock [SPUC] literature, and you saw these tiny little feet that someone was holding, you know, blood and gore everywhere'.²⁵ Arguably, one significant distinction between the two countries was not the religious background or opinions of the anti-abortion opposition, but how feminists responded. Unlike in France, there was less attempt by the WLM to convince society that a theological belief in abortion as murder and support for the legalisation of abortion were not necessarily mutually exclusive. For example, writing in a 1979 article, Eileen Fairweather noted that not all anti-abortionists were anti-women, and the majority of SPUC Catholics were in fact working-class women.²⁶ She argued that the WLM relied too much on the argument that abortion was not 'killing' and

²²Roger Lewin, 'Abortion: Getting the Facts Right', *New Scientist*, April 3, 1975. See also 'Select Hearing Committee Hearings Condemns White's Bill', *Spare Rib*, No.39, September 1975, 22; Liz White, 'Horror Comic Exposed', *Spare Rib*, No.36, June 1975, 22-23.

²³Joni Lovenduski, 'Parliament, Pressure Groups, Networks and the Women's Movement', in *The New Politics of Abortion*, eds. Joni Lovenduski and Joyce Putshoorn (SAGE Publications, 1986), 58; Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States* (Penguin Books, 1999), 360; Melvyn D. Read, 'The Pro-Life Movement', *Parliamentary Affairs* 3 (1998): 448.

²⁴For more information on Catholic anti-abortion arguments see Christopher Kaczor, *The Ethics of Abortion: Women's Rights, Human Life and the Question of Justice* (Routledge, 2011).

²⁵From 'The UK Women's Liberation Movement Scottish Women's Liberation Movement Workshop' (9/05/09), University of Edinburgh, 90. Transcript available at The Women's Library, Glasgow, uncatalogued.

²⁶*Ibid.*

it would be more effective to focus on the strains of motherhood and admit 'it is possible for people to support a woman's right to choose whether they believe abortion is killing or not'.²⁷

Like in the MLF, the focus on abortion on demand by the WLM was significant: as Browne notes, the originality of the feminist view of abortion came from this 'demand for a women's right to self-determination'.²⁸ However, unlike in France, where feminists were aiming to create a new law, arguably as it was threats to the 1967 Act and the rise of anti-abortion rhetoric that were the major catalysts for the feminist campaigns, this contributed to the rise of a rights-based approach to abortion.²⁹ Feminist campaigns focused on the autonomy of the woman, arguing she had the right to control her own body, while anti-abortion campaigners highlighted what they perceived as the rights of the foetus.³⁰ This often shaped the way British feminists discussed abortion. For example, in the previously cited article, Fairweather also argued that 'the women's movement was still very young when abortion first became a political football. We duly kicked it back and, faced with the opposition's set of slogans, defensively came up with our own'.³¹ Unlike in France, this meant that, as Hoggart notes, 'claims for rights and not social change became associated with the abortion debate'.³² Along with the polarisation of abortion and religion by feminists mentioned above, it perhaps demonstrates how, unlike French feminists, the desire to maintain collective unity against anti-abortionists contributed to a sidelining of the nuances of opinion on abortion by the WLM.

From Male Involvement to Bodily Autonomy

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Browne, *Women's Liberation*, 208.

²⁹Laurie Shrage, *Moral Dilemmas of Feminism: Prostitution, Adultery and Abortion* (Routledge, 1994), 57.

³⁰See for example Staff Reporter, 'State abortion'.

³¹Eileen Fairweather, 'The Feelings Behind the Slogans', *Spare Rib*, No.87, October 1979, in *No Turning Back: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement 1975–80*, eds. Feminist Anthology Collective (The Women's Press, 1981), 25-36.

³²Lesley Hoggart, *Feminist Campaigns for Birth Control and Abortion Rights in Britain* (The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), 23. See also Rowbotham, *The Past*, 86-88.

Despite the significance of abortion to the WLM, the movement did not have 'the forces to initiate mass action on the issue', which led to feminists working with other organisations.³³ Two significant examples that will be examined were *Doctors for a Woman's Choice on Abortion* (DWCA) and the National Abortion Campaign (NAC).³⁴ The MLF similarly worked with an abortion-only group and a doctors' organisation. In both movements this led to similar questions about the relationship of outside organisations and men to feminist campaigns, although there were differences in the activism of the groups in each country.

The NAC was a mixed-sex organisation formed in 1975 to defend the 1967 Act from The White Bill. The nearest equivalent in France was the MLAC, as both were mixed feminist-aligned groups with a socialist background. The NAC and the WLM were strongly linked from the former's inception. For example, at their first conference in October 1975 a resolution stated that 'the National Abortion Campaign affirms its commitment to a feminist structure and non-hierarchical organisation', and highlighted that 'we want our sisters to know that we fully support the other demands of the WL movement (some of our committee are actively involved in other feminist issues)'.³⁵ Their campaigning slogan was 'Abortion on Demand: A Woman's Right to Choose', and their aims included the establishment in law of 'a woman's right to make the decision to have an abortion without any legal or medical restrictions'.³⁶ Their demands were more radical than the existing legislation, and, like the MLAC, based on a feminist analysis of abortion and sexuality, underlining the importance of female autonomy and rejecting the power of the medical establishment. Yet, unlike the

³³NAC Newsletter, March 1977 (Women's Liberation Conference Papers 1971-74, The Women's Library, London, 5WRR/B/01).

³⁴Both had links to the WLM and were part of the *Coordinating Committee in Defence of the 1967 Abortion Act* (Co-ord), an umbrella group comprising of various groups against the restriction of the 1967 Act.

³⁵NAC Newsletter, Nov 1975 (Women's Liberation Conference Papers 1971-74, The Women's Library, London, 5WRR/B/01). See also NAC Newsletter May 1976 (Women's Liberation Conference Papers, 1971-74, The Women's Library, London, 5WRR/B/01); Jane Noble and Ann Scott, 'Abortion Conference: Structure and Feminism', *Spare Rib*, No.42, January 1976, 20-21; National Abortion Campaign, 'NAC Aims from NAC Conference Report 1975', in Hoggart, *Feminist Campaigns*, 169.

³⁶'NAC Aims', 169.

MLAC, who advocated that women learn how to perform abortions themselves, the NAC was perhaps less radical, in a sense a more 'traditional' pressure group working within the political sphere.³⁷

As noted, both movements wanted to examine the relationship between men, women, and sexuality. Men's involvement in feminism was controversial in both the WLM and MLF.³⁸ As a topic inextricably linked with heterosexual intercourse, discussions on abortion often questioned the role men should play in feminist campaigns. Just as the MLAC received criticism from *Psych et Po* and others over accepting male members, as one of the most high-profile British feminist organisations, the NAC was likewise the lightning rod for such discussions. As Browne notes, suspicion of the involvement of men led some to question whether it was even a feminist organisation.³⁹ The NAC did attempt to combat such worries. For example, The NAC Aims and Structure Resolution, passed at the 1975 conference, stated that 'the NAC recognises that women best understand how to campaign for these demands [abortion on demand]' and that 'women have the right to closed meetings, to vote and organise activities independently from men'.⁴⁰ Much like the MLF who criticised MLAC's actions as erasing female bodily autonomy, for some British feminists, this was insufficient and it was felt if the NAC took up other issues, or linked their demands for abortion to the 'Sixth Demand' on sexuality, they would have a broader appeal to those in the WLM. It would alleviate worries about the

³⁷The only evidence I have found of British women performing abortions themselves was a pamphlet titled 'Common Knowledge' from an unnamed group. They argued that women must learn how to perform abortions themselves in case abortion ever became illegal. See Anonymous, 'Common Knowledge' (Unknown date, Papers of Elizabeth Wilson, The Women's Library, London, 7EAW W/B/4).

³⁸See Nicholas Owen, 'Men and the 1970s British Women's Liberation Movement', *The Historical Journal* 56 (2013): 801-826; Lynne Segal, 'Slow Change or No change? Feminism, Socialism and the Problem of Men', *Feminist Review* 31 (1989): 5-21. There were also some attempts by men to create 'men's movements' alongside the WLM: see, Members of a London Group, 'Men's Movement...Men Against Sexism', *Spare Rib*, No.24, June 1974, 23; John Hyland, 'Birmingham Men's Conference', *Spare Rib*, No.19, January 1974, 20-21.

³⁹Browne, *Women's Liberation*, 218.

⁴⁰NAC Newsletter, February 1981 (Women's Liberation Conference Papers 1971-74, The Women's Library, London, 5WRR/B/01).

involvement of men and the trade unions, and the dilution of a 'feminist' analysis, and demonstrate that abortion on demand was a request for female sexual autonomy.⁴¹ For example, for some women it was 'perfectly absurd that the whole question of the function of women's bodies, childbirth, our sexuality should be decided by anyone but ourselves', and men's involvement in the campaigns was counter-productive.⁴²

Conversely, like the MLAC, there were others in the NAC who believed that male involvement was necessary for the success of the campaign. For example, following the conclusion of the Corrie campaign, the Brent and West London branch of the NAC shed their male members, which led to difficulties in recruiting new members. In a letter to the NAC newsletter, Michael Idun, a member from the Croydon branch, wrote 'I have always understood NAC's objectives to necessitate the mobilisation of the broadest possible support for our campaign. This broad support, however, cannot materialise if local groups are confined to women only'.⁴³ This was an argument encountered at almost every NAC meeting and conference. For example, at the 1981 conference, one of the most popular workshops was a forum entitled 'Abortion – an issue for men?' This was a debate between those who believed it was a 'positive step towards change when men showed an interest in contraception or abortion and therefore shouldn't be excluded', and those adamant that 'women needed to be autonomous if they were ever to make real changes'.⁴⁴ They eventually decided that the issue was a red herring as 'it was predominately women running the campaign and there weren't hordes of men knocking on the door to be let in

⁴¹See for example, NAC Newsletter, March 1978 (Women's Liberation Conference Papers 1971-74, The Women's Library, London, 5WRR/B/01); Bristol Women's Liberation, 'About Abortion and Contraception' (Undated pamphlet, Women's Liberation Folder 2, The Women's Library, London, 7LIM/03); Ruth Petrie and Anna Livingstone, 'Out of the Backstreets', *Red Rag*, Autumn 1976, 12-15.

⁴²Bristol, 'About'. See also Anonymous, 'The Man Question' (Undated pamphlet, Women's Liberation Folder 2, The Women's Library, London, 7LIM/03).

⁴³Michael Idun to NAC, January 1981 (NAC Newsletter Collection Nov 1975–Dec 1982, The Women's Library, London, 5WRR/B/01).

⁴⁴NAC Newsletter, March 1981 (NAC Newsletter Collection Nov 1975–Dec 1982, The Women's Library, London, 5WRR/B/01).

anyway'.⁴⁵ The popularity of such a discussion implies that these feminists wanted men to be involved in feminist campaigns on abortion, and were aware of the need for broad support, but could not decide on the best approach. In the debates on pornography and prostitution in both movements, feminists debated the pernicious impacts of the construction of male sexuality on women, while discussions on lesbian separatism questioned whether sexual relationships with men should be rejected. With abortion, for the NAC and MLAC, the question was instead the efficacy of men as campaigning allies, and whether ensuring your aims were met was more important than remaining distinctively 'feminist'.

This question also arose as feminists worked with medical organisations campaigning for abortion. In both Britain and France there were groups of doctors who campaigned on abortion, although they had contrasting approaches and connections to women's liberation.⁴⁶ In France, the main group was *Groupe Information Santé* (GIS) (The Group for Health Information); in Britain a significant group was DWCA, which has received little attention from historians of the WLM, Browne aside, in comparison to the GIS.⁴⁷ Founded in Edinburgh in 1976 by two doctors, Nadine Harrison and Judith Bury, DWCA wanted to 'make it clear to the public and to MPs that a large number of doctors would favour a change in the law to give women the right to make the abortion decision', 'to press for such a change in the law', and 'to answer at a medical level the arguments of anti-abortionists'.⁴⁸ It was a mixed-sex organisation and in comparison to GIS, who had more explicit connections with the MLAC – both in member crossover and campaigns – DWCA's connection to the WLM was more abstract. Nevertheless, they saw themselves as linked in spirit. For example, Harrison was involved with the WLM and stated that although the organisation 'was not Women's Movement, it wasn't a women-only group by any means [...] it was totally and utterly inspired by the National Abortion

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶For more information on the views of the medical community to the White and Corrie Bills, see John Keown, *Abortion, Doctors and the Law: Some Aspects of the Legal Regulation on Abortion in England from 1803–1982* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 141-146; 152-158.

⁴⁷Browne, *Women's Liberation*, 214-215.

⁴⁸DWCA Aims and Beliefs, 1976 (Wellcome Library, London, SA/NAC/E/215).

Campaign'.⁴⁹ DWCA often used feminist language to describe their opinions on abortion, focusing on the bodily autonomy of women. For example, they believed 'the decision should be the woman's and that the doctor's role is to provide information', although they did not believe doctors should be forced to perform abortions, implying they did not want to create a more radical abortion law, like some in the WLM, but instead ensure that the 1967 Act was not abolished.⁵⁰

In both countries, women's bodily autonomy was often shaped by the attitudes of doctors. The debates on abortion were therefore also about the relationship between the state and women's sexuality. Unlike in France, in the British context, more women had personal experiences of attempting to obtain a legal abortion, and being humiliated by doctors. One example was Marie Arnold, who found it difficult to get an abortion even though the child would be born deformed. She was told by a SPUC-supporting doctor she would have to wait two more weeks, to be induced into labour. Arnold wrote 'I knew what he meant and I thought, "You bastard. It's barbaric and there must be other methods"'.⁵¹ As Rowbotham noted in 1989, the fact women still had to get permission from two doctors to obtain an abortion had been criticised by the WLM.⁵² There was a feeling that doctors, and by extension the state, had taken control away from women, who would be constrained by the political or religious views of the doctor.⁵³ In addition, anti-abortion groups like SPUC often argued that abortion on demand restricted the rights of doctors. For example, in 1967 a SPUC spokesman stated that 'no-one can deny a woman's right to abort herself, if she decides that this is what she wants, knowing the grave risks. But I challenge her right to involve nursing and medical practitioners in her decision'.⁵⁴

⁴⁹Scottish WL Transcript, 45.

⁵⁰DWCA Aims and Beliefs.

⁵¹Marie Arnold, 'One Woman's Abortion', *Spare Rib*, No.45, April 1976, 15.

⁵²Rowbotham, *The Past*, 70.

⁵³See for example, Angela Phillips, 'Everything you need to know about abortion', *Spare Rib*, No.8, February 1973, 36-38, which presented an overview of the discrepancies in availability of abortion across the various regions.

⁵⁴Staff Reporter, 'State abortion'.

This may explain why organisations like DWCA were significant. Unlike in the French context, in Britain abortion was a service doctors were meant to provide but often did not. DWCA's actions were therefore perhaps more persuasive than feminist campaigns, because of the power accorded doctors by the 1967 Act. It also conceivably explains why DWCA were more respectable than GIS in their actions, convincing other doctors to support them, rather than staging public protests, or proclaiming they had performed illegal abortions: for DWCA the aim was to change this relationship between doctors and female patients. Despite this, arguably, in both countries, the real importance of doctors' support for abortion rights was its cover of respectable moderation, making feminist demands seem more palatable. It broadened the argument into the medical sphere, and showed that abortion could be seen as a medical issue and not just a moral one. Yet it seemed to dilute arguments about female sexual autonomy, disconnecting abortion from feminist demands for more sexual and bodily agency for women.

Abortion, Class and 'Sexual Liberation'

These tensions about the extent to which female sexual and bodily autonomy should play a central role in feminist campaigns can also be seen in the actions of the NAC. As an issue that often disproportionately affected working-class women, for *Choisir* and *Les Pétroleuses*, or British socialist feminists, abortion was the best chance to present a socialist feminist analysis of sexuality and female autonomy.⁵⁵ Others in the WLM, or in *Psych et Po* in France, however, thought it was important to counter this narrative with a more significantly feminist one of female autonomy. As Hoggart notes, free abortion on demand became a 'symbol of women's fight against patriarchal society and the establishment' but the manner of this fight, whether through the prism of gender

⁵⁵Many of these arguments focused on the links between reproduction, capitalism, and motherhood, influenced by the writings of Friedrich Engels. See Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Penguin Books, 1972 edition); Rowbotham, *The Past*, 89-93; Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought* (Unwin, 1984), 69-95; Lynne Segal, *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism* (Virago Press, 1987); Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 114.

or class, became a central disagreement in the WLM.⁵⁶ Unlike in France, these questions cropped up in discussions about possible partnerships between the WLM, NAC and trade unions.

The NAC was from its inception closely aligned to socialist feminism. For example, at their first conference in 1975, they stressed the importance of a campaign directed at working-class women who 'will be worst hit by the changes in the law'.⁵⁷ Having a broader and better organised infrastructure than feminists, the Labour movement was perhaps better suited to defending the Act, and abortion was discussed by the Trades Union Congress⁵⁸. Whilst in France *Choisir* and others stressed the benefits of abortion for working-class women, the NAC and TUC often described the dangers that would befall working-class women if the 1967 Act was abolished. As *Choisir* did in France, for example, in the NAC Aims at the 1975 conference, they stated:

[...] the victims of any changes in the existing legislation will be working women, the poor and the inarticulate. What we are demanding is that these women have the same rights to choose whether to have a pregnancy terminated as the rich and privileged have always been able to.⁵⁹

Unlike in France, those defending the Act politically used similar arguments, in order to influence the progression of the White and Corrie Bills.⁶⁰ The TUC and NAC partnership tried to convince the Labour Party, that as an issue of class,

⁵⁶Hoggart, 'Feminist Principles', 182.

⁵⁷NAC Newsletter, November 1975; See also 'Statement from the NAC to the Co-Ord Meeting', November 2, 1970 (Birth Control Campaign NAC and Co-Ord Dispute over Time Limit, Wellcome Library, London, 1978-9 SA/BCC/C28).

⁵⁸A federation of trade unions in England and Wales, which represented the majority of trade unions.

⁵⁹Cited in Hoggart, *Feminist Campaigns*, 158. See also National Abortion Campaign, *Abortion: Our Struggle for Control* (National Abortion Campaign, 1980).

⁶⁰Hoggart, *Feminist Campaigns*, 155.

abortion should be seen as a party issue, not a matter of conscience.⁶¹ At the Labour Abortion Rights Campaign conference in 1977, for example, those campaigning against the Bills argued:

Abortion is a political issue. It is a basic right like the right to form trade unions, the right to strike, the right to decent living conditions and all other basic rights that the Labour Party and the trade unions have fought for since their foundation.⁶²

This may explain why there was not the same strength of trade union support in France as in Britain, as this presentation of abortion as a political right was not as widespread, because the majority of feminist campaigns were within the judicial system.

As Coote and Campbell noted, the relationship between the NAC, the TUC, and feminists was not always a comfortable one.⁶³ In both countries, feminists disputed the best way to publicly represent feminist ideas on sexuality. For example, at the 1978 NAC conference a resolution to organise a national demonstration in defence of the 1967 Act against the Corrie Bill was passed. On October 31, 1979, 80,000 people turned out for a TUC demonstration which Coote and Campbell described as the 'largest trade union demonstration ever held for a cause which lay beyond the traditional scope of collective bargaining', and the most tangible achievement by the TUC for women's rights.⁶⁴ The NAC argued it was better 'to have an enormous TUC demonstration in defence of the '67 Act rather than a smaller demo on "free abortion on demand", a woman's right to choose with no medical or legal restrictions'.⁶⁵ As the NAC was involved

⁶¹For an overview of the relationship between the Labour Party and the WLM see Stephen Brooke, *Sexual Politics: Sexuality, Family Planning and The British Left from the 1880s to the Present Day* (Oxford University Press, 2011); the WLM and other progressive movements see Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright, *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism* (Merlin Press, 1979).

⁶²Hoggart, *Feminist Campaigns*, 173. See also Jill Nye, 'Abortion: More than a Conventional Meeting', *Spare Rib*, No.36, June 1975, 22-23.

⁶³Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 11.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 147.

⁶⁵Cited in Hoggart, *Feminist Campaigns*, 99.

in building mass defensive campaigns it tended to downplay feminist demands for abortion rights, replacing 'A Woman's Right to Choose' with the less divisive 'No Return to the Backstreets'.⁶⁶ As Hoggart notes, this was a pattern repeated throughout the feminist movement in both countries, as women had to 'relinquish control of the definitions of issues that found their way on to mainstream political agendas'.⁶⁷

As Hoggart argues, the difficulty for the NAC was formulating a socialist feminist ideology which claimed abortion as a woman's right on the basis of women's reproductive capacity, whilst simultaneously challenging a gendered division of labour.⁶⁸ This can perhaps be seen at the TUC march. There were arguments about who would be at the front and carry the banner, with some worried the march would be seen as a TUC demonstration, not a feminist one.⁶⁹ As it started, around 200 women with a London WLM banner overtook the march, which caused TUC chairman Len Murray to request the police to place a cordon between the women and the main march.⁷⁰ Later press reports focused on the annoyance of many from the TUC at these actions.⁷¹ In an article in WIRES in December 1979, two of the women involved described why they forced themselves to the front of the march. They argued that the TUC had 'leapt on the bandwagon' and presenting abortion as a class issue silenced and

⁶⁶Ibid.; Annabell Ferriman, 'Women and Police clash outside Commons', *The Times*, February 9, 1980.

⁶⁷Hoggart, 'Feminist Principles', 1. This was similar to the campaigns of some women's groups in the pre-1960s context, such as Eleanor Rathbone's family allowance campaign. For more information see Caitriona Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928 – 64* (Manchester University Press, 2013).

⁶⁸Hoggart, *Feminist Campaigns*, 177. See for example Anna Gordon, *The Fight for Women's Right to Choose* (National Abortion Campaign, 1977), 9; Anon, 'Report back on Politics of Abortion: Forum on a WRTC – February 21, 1981', in NAC Newsletter, March 1981; Gill Butler, *Abortion and Sexuality* (National Abortion Campaign, 1977), 11.

⁶⁹Ibid., 200. See also Al Garthwaite and Valerie Sinclair, 'The TUC's Right to Choose', in *No Turning Back*, 36-42; Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 146-149.

⁷⁰Susan Hemmings, 'Abortion Demo Special' and Sue O'Sullivan, 'Two TUC women give their views to Spare Rib', *Spare Rib*, No.89, Dec 1979, 20-22; 21.

⁷¹See also Garthwaite and Sinclair, 'The TUC's', 36-42.

restricted women.⁷² They also questioned male involvement in the abortion campaigns arguing that 'if you accept that abortion laws are solely an economic class issue then it's logical to have demonstrations on the issue led by mixed groups of men and women, and to have husbands, boyfriends or rapists having an equal say in whether a pregnancy should continue'.⁷³ Despite the criticisms of framing abortion as a class issue by the women who interrupted the march, their actions arguably demonstrated that they believed issues dealing with women's bodies *should* receive attention from left-wing politics, and men must correspondingly adjust their behavior, angering male activists who believed this analysis was not relevant to the labour movement. There were similar disagreements between some French feminists and trade unionists about the involvement of the MLF at a trade union march in the same year (see Chapter Six), implying that there were limits to male leftist support of feminist campaigns.

The majority of scholarly analysis on the TUC march focuses on this, examining what the disagreement revealed about the relationships between the trade unions, the NAC and WLM.⁷⁴ Yet it can be argued that a significant element of this dispute which has received less attention, is what it revealed about 'sexual liberation' and abortion. Although both movements saw abortion as beneficial because it allowed women to have sex without the fear of pregnancy, in France, as will be explored, some feminists also drew connections to female sexual pleasure. Conversely, some in the WLM argued abortion was a restrictive element of the new 'permissive society'. For example, in the WIRES article, the authors argued men were only interested in abortion campaigns so they could have sex without consequences.⁷⁵ Writing in 1979 Fairweather likewise claimed 'the (relative) enthusiasm with which the male left adopted the slogan "abortion on demand" may well be because abortion can

⁷²Ibid. See also 'Letters about the conflict', *Spare Rib*, No.89, Dec 1979, 24-25. Some feminists worried that the movement would be swallowed up by the broader left. See Jane Noble and Ann Scott, 'Hackney Abortion Campaign', *Spare Rib*, No.43, Dec 1975; Rowbotham, *The Past*, 67; Segal, *Is the Future*, 207.

⁷³Garthwaite and Sinclair, 'The TUC's Right', 36-42.

⁷⁴Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 146-149; Rowbotham, *The Past*, 89-93.

⁷⁵Garthwaite and Sinclair, 'The TUC's Right', 36-42.

mean men avoid any responsibility for the less pleasant consequences of sexuality'.⁷⁶ The authors of the WIRES article also connected their argument to broader WLM debates on heterosexuality; stating that 'penetration (let alone ejaculation) is not necessary for women's sexual pleasure', and 'male society brainwashes women into thinking that they must want to have intercourse (or there is something wrong with them and they're missing out on the biggest thrill of all time)'.⁷⁷ Consequently, they argued, until heterosexual sex occurs under more equal circumstances, women have to protect themselves 'from unpleasant circumstances'.⁷⁸ This presented abortion as a disagreeable necessity women had to endure in order to have sex with men, and changing gender relations as more significant than working with trade unions for reformist change. This implies that unlike in France, for those who interrupted the TUC march, abortion was another example of male oppression, not connected to sexual pleasure.

The Feelings Behind the Slogans

Those who interrupted the TUC march were highlighting an unease shared by others in the WLM. For some, reframing abortion as a class issue meant that emotions were lost behind the slogans, making it difficult to convince women to talk about what Fairweather described as a 'a pain which goes so deep you can't even bear to think about it – much less fight back'⁷⁹. In both countries, feminists discussed the personal experiences of women who had had abortions, and how this connected to motherhood, although in contrasting ways.

There was a growing concern that 'women were being talked at about a right that is for other women, not for them'.⁸⁰ Writing in 1989, Rowbotham noted that there:

is probably some truth in the argument that the emphasis on trade union support [...] influenced the terms in which the

⁷⁶Fairweather, 'Feelings', 25-36. See also Anon, 'The Man Question'.

⁷⁷Garthwaite and Sinclair, 'The TUC's Right', 36-42. These were similar arguments used by political lesbians when advocating separatism. See Chapter Three for more information.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Fairweather 'Feelings', 25-36.

⁸⁰Rowbotham, *The Past*, 68. See also Petrie and Livingstone 'Out of The Backstreets', 12-15.

call for abortion was presented. Fusty trades council rooms are not the most commodious sites for learned perorations on the multiplicity of female desire.⁸¹

The late 1970s/80s, saw a move towards a more varied discussion of abortion by some in the WLM. For example, in an oral history interview, Jan McKinley described how the 1979 conference 'Feelings Behind the Slogans' was 'the first time that we allowed ourselves to have a discussion about the feelings behind having an abortion and termination'.⁸² McKinley stated prior to the conference 'we'd been absolutely unequivocal, nobody was to leave the line that it was a foetus and it was unplanned and you weren't supposed to have any feelings about it'.⁸³ Such arguments were echoed by *Psych et Po*, as will be seen later in the chapter, who believed abortion should be described as commonplace, without any acknowledgement of the conflicting emotions some women might feel. Arguably this existed in many other feminist campaigns on sexuality, as women grappled with maintaining the broad consensus needed to enact change, while allowing individual women the freedom to describe their personal feelings. The difficulty can be seen in the tensions between the TUC and NAC, and WLM and the actions of *Choisir*, examined later in the chapter. Despite the feminist desire for the movement to be women-only and based on female experience, their 'success' in enacting change on abortion perhaps came from working alongside others from outside the movement, or broadening their arguments out from female sexual or bodily autonomy.

Sexual freedom and the disconnection of sex from motherhood were significant elements of feminist discussions in both movements. As Zoe Fairbairns noted in an oral history interview: 'I had no wish to be a mother, but I liked having sex with men. Contraception was the answer, particularly the latest

⁸¹Rowbotham, *The Past*, 81.

⁸²From 'The UK Women's Liberation Movement Campaigns and Demands, Women's Liberation History Workshop' (6/06/09), The Women's Library, London, 37. Transcript available at The Women's Library, Glasgow, uncatalogued. See also Brent Against Corrie Pamphlet Group, *Mixed Feelings* (B.A.C.P.G, 1980), which contained personal testimonies from women about the conflicting feelings they had after having an abortion.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 41.

invention, the Pill [...] Liberation indeed'.⁸⁴ Abortion on demand made this disconnection even easier. Motherhood was a topic of discussion almost from the start of the movement in both countries as women sought to challenge traditional representations of women.⁸⁵ Hoggart identifies two sides to the motherhood and abortion discussion in the WLM. The first was 'claiming women's rights to individual reproductive control as an essential part of the struggle for gender equality. This generally involves an explicit rejection of materialist ideology'.⁸⁶ Women, they argued, should be free to choose motherhood themselves, and reject the constraints of identifying as a 'mother'. The second side were feminists who claimed the right to abortion 'upon an acceptance of woman's maternal role within existing social relations of reproduction: women defined as mothers should be able to control that role'.⁸⁷ Arguably it was the latter that was most influential on feminist abortion campaigns in Britain and France. Presenting abortion as the right of a woman to choose when to have children, or focusing on the benefits to children of being 'wanted', was perhaps more persuasive, as it required a less radical overhaul of ideas on gender relations. Yet, it meant the abortion campaigns remained in the context of possible motherhood, not sexual desire or autonomy.

In both countries, many feminist discussions around motherhood were negative. Writing in 1989, for example, Rowbotham noted that 'in the early days of Women's Liberation the emphasis was on challenging the myth that motherhood was woman's inevitable destiny'.⁸⁸ In an oral history interview Esther Breitenbach described what she saw as an 'anti-motherhood line' in the early 1970s.⁸⁹ Breitenbach noted that women with children were a 'minority' at

⁸⁴Ibid., 37.

⁸⁵This section will briefly examine motherhood and abortion. For more information on the WLM and motherhood see Annette Muir, 'On Having Children', *Shrew*, January 1970, 6; Anne Bachelli and Hilary Rawlings, 'Sex and Procreation', *Shrew*, February 1970, 9-11, 16; 'Motherhood', *Shrew*, January 1970, 1; Sheila Rowbotham, 'To Be or Not to Be: The Dilemmas of Mothering', *Feminist Review* 31 (1989): 2-93; id., *The Past*, 94, 112; Katherine Gieve, 'Rethinking Feminist Attitudes Towards Motherhood', *Feminist Review* 25 (1987): 38-45.

⁸⁶Hoggart, *Feminist Campaigns*, 11.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Rowbotham, *The Past*, 82.

⁸⁹The UK WLM Transcript, London, 43.

the early conferences and consequently felt 'uncomfortable'.⁹⁰ Breitenbach pointed to the writings of the American radical feminist Shulamith Firestone as significant in the creation of this idea that 'to be liberated, women had to be free from reproduction'.⁹¹ In her influential 1970 text *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, Firestone argued that, to achieve true equality with men, women must erase biological distinctions, such as their role as reproducers and mothers, as it was this that kept them second-class citizens.⁹² This radical feminist belief in biological differences such as motherhood as constrictive to women contributed to the connection between motherhood and oppression often made by some in both movements. For example, writing in 1980, Liz Heron described how through the WLM feminists with children 'discovered their oppression and had the support of their sisters in throwing off guilt and finding independence'.⁹³ Similarly in France, there were discussions on the oppressive nature of motherhood, *Psych et Po* and others describing motherhood as something forced on women. For such feminists, the right to abortion was therefore also about acquiring freedom from the oppressive aspects of the female body and sexuality, reconfiguring their role as women.

In her thesis, however, Setch rejects the idea that the WLM was inherently dismissive of motherhood, or focused on the negative aspects of child-rearing.⁹⁴ Writing in 1989 Rowbotham echoed this, and argued that the WLM provided a 'political space in which women were able to question motherhood' rather than an outright rejection.⁹⁵ It is certainly true that many in the WLM attempted to engage with questions on the benefits of motherhood,

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (William Morrow and Company, 1970).

⁹³Liz Heron, 'The Mystique of Motherhood', in *No Turning Back*, 139.

⁹⁴Eve Grace Setch, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Britain, 1969–79: Organisation, Creativity and Debate* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2000), 162.

⁹⁵Rowbotham, 'To Be', 85-88; *The Past*, 94, 112. One example of this is Sue Lipshitz, 'Are children loved enough, too much or too little', *Spare Rib*, No.14, August 1973, 15-16, which rejected the idea that children would suffer emotional damage if separated from their mother.

and provided advice about childcare and the family.⁹⁶ Yet it was this questioning of motherhood as an inevitability for women that was one of the most significant elements of second-wave feminism and abortion. It represented women challenging traditional norms in their personal lives, through discussion with other women, one of the ways the women's liberation movements were so original and groundbreaking.

France

Notre ventre nous appartient': Abortion and Bodily Autonomy

Just as occurred in the WLM, French feminist campaigns on abortion grappled with bodily autonomy and class, and questioned what was the most effective way to present feminist demands. The first generally occurred in two contexts: motherhood and sexuality. As Michael Sibalis notes, the 'sexual revolution' in France not only aimed to liberate sexuality but also to 'change the – capitalist – society as a whole by changing the sexual life and character of individuals'.⁹⁷ This can be seen in discussions on abortion. For example, in an article in *Tout!*, the authors described how men and women had been ashamed of their bodies and sexual desires. For them the only way to overcome this shame, and change society, was by advocating an individual's right to control their own body, writing that: 'l'embrigadement du corps est la condition de la soumission des esprits' (The regimentation of the body is the precondition for the subjection of the

⁹⁶See, for example, Marsha Rowe, 'Changing Childcare,' *Spare Rib*, No.66, January 1978, 14-18 which examined collective households.

⁹⁷Michael Sibalis, 'The Gay Liberation Movement in France', in *Sexual Revolutions*, eds. Gert Hekma and Alain Giami (Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 189.

mind).⁹⁸ The writers also grouped the right to abortion with the right to homosexuality, and the right of minors to freedom of sexuality as issues of bodily control.⁹⁹ As Bourg notes, and unlike in Britain, the influence of theorists like Wilhelm Reich on some French male leftists often resulted in an analysis of sexual behaviour through the lens of 'sexual repression', which consequently required a feminist response.¹⁰⁰ Disagreements between feminists and male leftists over the limits of 'sexual freedom' also occurred in debates on rape to a greater extent than in Britain (see Chapter Six), and debates on sex and power relations contributed to the fragmentation of French gay rights groups (see Chapter Three). However, in the *Tout!* article the issues remained connected, implying there was still an overlap of ideas between male leftists, gay liberation and feminism at this point, unlike in Britain.

This overlap perhaps explains the stronger connection of sexual shame, pleasure and abortion by French feminists compared to the WLM. Abortion as a necessity to achieve full sexual equality between men and women was discussed almost from the start of the MLF. For example, in a text in the special edition of the journal *Partisans*, mentioned in the Introduction, Anne Zelensky-Tristan¹⁰¹ and Jacqueline Feldman argued that:

une véritable révolution sexuelle ne peut s'exercer que si la femme est véritablement l'égale de l'homme pour que l'échange sexuel ait lieu entre deux "sujets" et non pas entre un "sujet " et un "objet".

(a proper sexual revolution can only be carried out/happen if the woman is properly equal to the man, so that sexual

⁹⁸*Tout! Ce que nous voulons; tout*, No.12, April 1971. This issue of *Tout!* was edited by feminists and gay rights activists working together in the group *Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire (FHAR)*. For more information, see Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 185-187; Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen, eds., *Gender and Sexuality: Transformative Politics in the Cultural Imagination in 1968* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 90-91.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰Bourg, *From Revolution*, 185-187.

¹⁰¹At the time of the article Zelensky referred to herself as 'Anne Zelensky' not 'Anne Zelensky-Tristan' as in later years.

exchange/engagement takes place between two “subjects” and not between a “subject” and an “object”).¹⁰²

For Zelensky-Tristan and Feldman, 'la libération du corps' (bodily freedom) was the most important element in achieving this sexual parity, and the right to abortion a significant element in this.¹⁰³

Consequently, unlike the WLM, some in the MLF claimed sexual oppression was propagated by abortion remaining illegal, and decriminalising abortion would improve women's sexual pleasure. For example, a 1971 article in *Le Torchon brûle* argued that a woman 'ne pourra pas avoir une sexualité épanouie parce qu'elle sera obsédée par la peur d'être enceinte' (the woman's sexuality cannot blossom/fully develop because she will be obsessed with the fear of getting pregnant), and a more open discussion on women's bodies, without shame 'permet notre épanouissement sexuel' (allows our sexual pleasure to fully blossom/to develop fully).¹⁰⁴ For the author, 'trop longtemps, beaucoup des femmes ont cru que faire l'amour, c'était faire des gosses, sans connaître la plaisir' (for too long, many women have believed that making love just meant having children, without experiencing sexual pleasure).¹⁰⁵ Arguably, British feminists saw the right to abortion as the right to control your own fertility and body, whereas the article's writers viewed it as an issue of fertility control, a rejection of sexual shame, and a necessity for political consciousness, due to the influence of theories of 'sexual repression'. The implication from this was that for Zelensky-Tristan and others, abortion provided the opportunity for a new type of heterosexuality, unlike in Britain, despite the actions of those who interrupted the TUC march. The WLM perhaps missed out on really exploring why the right to abortion would improve women's sexual pleasure.

¹⁰² *Libération des femmes: année zero, Partisans*, No.54-55, 1970 (Reprinted by François Maspero, 1972).

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ *Le Torchon brûle*, No.1, 1971. See also Anne Zelensky-Tristan, *Histoire de Vivre: Mémoires d'une féministe* (Calmann-Lévy, 2005), 60; Bibia Pavard, *Contraception et avortement dans la société française (1956–1979)* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Centre d'Histoire de Sciences Po, 2010), 388.

¹⁰⁵ *Le Torchon brûle*, No.1, 1971. See also *Les Chimères, Maternité esclave* (Union Générale d'Éditions, 1975), 20-33; Bourg, *From Revolution*, 185.

More than in the WLM, some French feminist discussions of a woman's right to control her own body also often contained abstract critiques of heterosexuality and dominant power relations, both implicit and explicit. As Duchen notes, *Psych et Po*, for example, who took little interest in abortion until 1979, argued that abortion allowed women to resist the male occupation of their bodies, which the foetus represented.¹⁰⁶ This was echoed in an article from a 1972 issue of *Le Torchon brûle* by women from *Féministes Révolutionnaires*, which described abortion as an aggression and a reminder that female sexuality is based on the exploitation of women's bodies.¹⁰⁷ In contrast, while some British radical feminists argued that all heterosexual sex represented a violation of female bodies, there was less abstract discussion of what the foetus represented, perhaps because of the lack of widespread psychoanalytical discussions on sexuality and female bodies.

As noted, in both countries, the significance of female autonomy to women's liberation meant that the right of a woman to control her own body was also framed as a right to choose when to become a mother. As Duchen notes, early MLF discussions around motherhood were almost entirely focused on abortion, and it was only from the late 1970s onwards that a more in-depth conversation occurred.¹⁰⁸ Like the WLM, these were often negative and argued for an outright rejection of motherhood being forced on women.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, the similarity in ideological origins between the two movements, meant that like some in the WLM, class struggle feminists connected motherhood and

¹⁰⁶*des femmes en mouvements*, No.4, 1979, 16. *Psych et Po* were critical of legislative reform, seeing it as simply integrating women into the masculine world. See Claire Duchen, *Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterrand* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 59. For more on their views on creativity and motherhood see Jennifer L. Sweatman, *The Risky Business of French Feminism: Publishing, Politics and Artistry* (Lexington Books, 2014), 44.

¹⁰⁷*Féministes Révolutionnaires*, 'Libérer nos corps ou libérer l'avortement', *Le Torchon brûle*, No.5, 1972. This was later reprinted by *des femmes*, which was the publishing wing of *Psych et Po*.

¹⁰⁸Duchen, *Feminism*, 51. See also *Les femmes s'entêtent* (Éditions Gallimard, 1975).

¹⁰⁹See for example *Le Torchon brûle*, No.1, 1971; *des femmes en mouvement hebdo*, No.30, 1979. There were also frequent discussions around the pain of childbirth, for example, *Le Quotidien des femmes*, No.18, 1975 and the transcribed video in *Questions Féministes 5* (1979).

procreation to economic oppression, and argued that motherhood should be rejected within a capitalist society. For example, *Choisir* argued that women were indoctrinated to believe they were destined for motherhood and that 'on exalte la maternité parce que la maternité c'est la façon de garder la femme au foyer et de lui faire faire le ménage' (people exalt motherhood because motherhood is the way to keep women at home and making them do housework).¹¹⁰

A detailed feminist analysis of motherhood came from a group of women connected to *Féministes Révolutionnaires* called *Les Chimères*, who published a collectively written book called *Maternité esclave* (Enslaved Motherhood).¹¹¹ In it they described the reasons why motherhood was forced on women in a capitalist society, and how 'on se laisse persuader qu'être une "femme", c'est être une "mère"' (women allow themselves to be persuaded that to be a "woman" is to be a "mother").¹¹² As in the WLM, many of their arguments examined how society pressured women to feel maternal or presented motherhood as the pinnacle of a woman's life. Other arguments were more specific to France: for example, a chapter was dedicated to examining the role of the government in convincing women that they must have children to ensure population growth and the continuation of the state.¹¹³ Unlike in the British context, this was arguably an example of the influence of the strong pronatalist current, and questions on citizenship in French political society.

Some French feminists also argued abortion could be beneficial to all children. For example, a drawing in the first edition of *Le Torchon brûle* (see Figure 2.1), which shows a smiling baby holding a placard with a sign

¹¹⁰*Choisir, La Cause des femmes*, eds., *Le Procès de Bobigny* (Éditions Gallimard, 1973), 125. See also *Les Pétroleuses*, 1974 (Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris, 396 PET Bul); Françoise Picq, *Libération des femmes: quarante ans de mouvement* (Éditions Dialogues, 2011), 209-221.

¹¹¹*Les Chimères, Maternité esclave* (Union Générale d'Éditions, 1975). Alongside a discussion of the implications and symbolism of motherhood, the book also provided practical information about menstruation, conception and childbirth that were hard to find elsewhere.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 51-61.

proclaiming it was 'plus chouette' (nicer) to live when you are wanted, appeared frequently in marches or demonstrations on abortion.



Figure 2.2: Originally appeared in *Le Torchon brûle* No.1, 1971.

As Pavard notes, the idea that a wanted child was happier and more psychologically balanced had existed within the arguments of family planning advocates since the 1950s.¹¹⁴ Indeed it had also been a key element of campaigns for abortion by British women's groups like the Women's Institutes and Townswomen's Guilds in the 1950s-60s.¹¹⁵ In absorbing the image, the MLAC argued that abortion was not about individual women, but society as a whole. While British feminists did argue that children should be wanted and not forced on women, in their campaigns there was more focus on the horrors of the backstreet, or the possible impact on working-class families. This can be simplified as benefits versus dangers, with the NAC and others tending to highlight the latter, the MLF and MLAC the former. The use of this image by the MLAC and others was perhaps more convincing than focusing on a woman's right to choose alone: it connected abortion to broader political ideas about

¹¹⁴Pavard, *Contraception*, 343. For more information on the history of the Family Planning movement in France see id., 101-179.

¹¹⁵For more information, see Caitriona Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928 – 64* (Manchester University Press, 2013).

citizenship. However, what Pavard does not examine are the limitations of the image. Examining sexual politics in the Third Republic, Karen Offen questions whether 'reproductive servitude was the ultimate price of women's admission to French citizenship' and whether this influenced the activism of French republican feminists.¹¹⁶ Arguably, this can be applied to this connection of abortion to future children and citizenship. It diluted the feminist message, transferring the positives from women to children, implying that the role of woman in the public sphere remained primarily reproductive. It meant that women continued to be locked into discussing their bodies within the context of motherhood, a constraint the MLF ostensibly wanted to dissolve.

Abortion, Illegality and Class

In both countries, abortion was the issue of sexuality that attracted the most interest from the wider political left, and as a consequence, feminists had to grapple with how much they wanted other organisations to be involved in their campaigns. Yet, unlike in Britain, as abortion was illegal in France, as Zancarini-Fournel notes, this meant that the 'question du rapport entre légalité, illégalité et légitimité est au centre de l'analyse politique et sociale de la période' (the question of the relationship between legality, illegality and legitimacy is at the centre of the political and social analyses during this period).¹¹⁷ The organisation that best symbolised this struggle over the question of illegal abortions was the MLAC.

As noted, the MLAC was a mixed, nationwide organisation founded in 1973 to campaign for the legalisation of abortion.¹¹⁸ Perhaps because of its radical actions, it was one of the only French organisations that received

¹¹⁶Karen M. Offen, 'Exploring the sexual politics of republican nationalism', in *Nationhood and Nationalism in France: From Boulangism to the Great War 1889–1918*, ed. Robert Tombs (HarperCollins, 1991), 206.

¹¹⁷Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, 'Histoire(s) du MLAC (1973-1975)', *CLIO: Histoire, Femmes et Sociétés* 18 (2003): 241-252.

¹¹⁸After abortion was legalised there were arguments within the group over whether 'mixité' should continue, as it was felt that some of the male members had lost interest in campaigning. See, for example: 'La mixité du MLAC, une erreur historique', *des femmes en mouvements*, No.12, May 1974.

coverage from British feminist periodicals like *Spare Rib*, with articles discussing its mixed membership, and campaigns.¹¹⁹ It was strongest in Paris and weaker in the more conservative, Catholic west of the country.¹²⁰ As Pavard notes, MLAC existed at the crossroads of the MLF, the Family Planning movement, the unions and far-left doctors.¹²¹ Like the NAC, it presented abortion as a class issue, and aimed, as Pavard notes, to stop procreation being the sole aim of sexuality.¹²² This idea was supported by Marxist feminist groups, including *Les Pétroleuses*, who aligned themselves with the MLAC in 1978, arguing that the MLAC 'a montré ainsi que la maternité et la sexualité concernent l'ensemble du mouvement ouvrier' (showed that motherhood and sexuality concern the whole of the working-class/workers' movement).¹²³ As Zancarini-Fournel notes, in the MLAC, 'le vocabulaire classique de l'extrême gauche et de la gauche se mêle à "un discours féministe"' (the classic vocabulary of the far-left and the left blended with a 'feminist' discourse), and abortion was classed as the best way to overturn both sexual and economic oppression.¹²⁴

The MLAC believed it was important for women to organise themselves collectively, and get involved in 'public power'.¹²⁵ Unlike the NAC, this led to

¹¹⁹ Tracy Ullveit-Moe, 'The French Abortion Debate', *Spare Rib*, No.22, March 1974, 26-27; Angela Phillips, 'Overview of The French movement', *Spare Rib*, No.35, May 1975, 21.

¹²⁰ Zancarini-Fournel, 'Histoire(s)', 241-252; 'News', *Spare Rib*, No.59, July 1977, 8; 'La mixité du MLAC'. In her history of the organisation, Zancarini-Fournel describes the MLAC as a product of the post-1968 activist culture in France. See Zancarini-Fournel, 'Histoire(s)', 241-252.

¹²¹ Pavard, *Contraception*, 384. For more information on the links between Planning familial, MLAC, and the CFDT, see Pascale Le Brouster, 'La CFDT et les associations féministes de 1970 à nos jours', in *Syndicats et Associations, Concurrence ou complémentarité?*, eds. Danielle Tartakowski et Françoise Tétard (Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2006), 409-418; Pascale Le Brouster, 'Contribution à l'histoire du Planning familial: le partenariat CFDT-MFPP au cours des années soixante-dix', *Genre et histoire 2* (2008): genrehistoire.revues.org/297 Accessed December 13, 2015.

¹²² Pavard, *Contraception*, 385.

¹²³ *Les Pétroleuses*, 1974, 8 (Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris, 396 PET Bul). See also Pavard, *Contraception*, 387-389; Zancarini-Fournel, 'Histoire(s)', 241-252.

¹²⁴ Zancarini-Fournel, 'Histoire(s)', 241-252.

¹²⁵ Bruno Frappant, 'Le MLAC n'organise plus de voyages collectifs à l'étranger', *Le Monde*, November 15, 1974, 5.

them both helping women go abroad to obtain abortions, and learning how to perform abortions themselves.¹²⁶ They arguably viewed their actions as the best collective response to the illegality of abortion. For example, writing in 1993, Picq, who was involved with the groups, stated that, 'le MLAC doit répondre à une demande énorme, accueillir, trouver des solutions collectives' (the MLAC has to respond to huge demands, to be welcoming, to find collective solutions) and did so by 'trois voyages par semaine vers l'Angleterre, deux vers Hollande' (three journeys a week to England, two to the Netherlands).¹²⁷ They argued that if women did not have this skill they were giving up control of their fertility and therefore their lives to someone else.¹²⁸ It took the idea of female bodily control to the extreme, making performing abortion a means for women to maintain collective power over their own fertility and sexuality. It meant the MLAC was operating almost like an alternative social service, taking power away from the state, in contrast to Britain, where feminists were attempting to work within state power, not outside it.

As in Britain, there were other medical groups in France not technically aligned with the MLF who advocated for abortion legalisation. The MLAC were also not the only group framing illegal abortions as a political act. Two significant examples were the *Groupe Information Santé* (GIS) and the *Comité pour la liberté de l'avortement et de la contraception* (Committee for Abortion and Contraception Freedom). Unlike DWCA, GIS has received more attention from historians such as Pavard and Zancarini-Fournel, probably because they engaged in more civil disobedience and direct action. Formed in the late 1960s, GIS had connections with the MLAC and was made up of mostly young male doctors and medical students from the far-left, who wanted to change the

¹²⁶The reason women were able to perform abortions so easily was due to the invention of the 'Karman method' by an American doctor, which required minimal equipment. For more information on the practice of illegal abortions by MLAC see Bibia Pavard, 'Genre, militantisme dans le Mouvement pour la liberté de l'avortement et de la contraception. Pratique des avortements (1973-1979)', *Clio: Histoire, Femmes et Sociétés* 29 (2009): 79-96.

¹²⁷Picq, *Libération*, 202.

¹²⁸Madeline Davis, 'The views of the Movement for the Liberation of Abortion, Childbirth and Contraception', *Spare Rib*, No.123, October 1982, 53-55.

nature of medical practice and legalise abortion. Pavard points to the context of the wars in Algeria and Vietnam as significant in the formation of GIS, and arguably the emphasis on overturning traditional power structures prevalent in discussions following the events of 1968 was another significant factor.¹²⁹

Like DWCA, their tracts focused on the discrepancy between the rich and poor's access to abortion, with the rich going abroad or to private clinics. However, unlike in Britain, they also highlighted the fact that many doctors opposed to the law performed abortions despite their illegality. It meant they were taking more risks than DWCA. For example, in the 'Manifeste de 331', a petition published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in 1973, they declared 'nous pratiquons des avortements, inculpez nous si vous osez!' (We perform abortions, charge us if you dare!)¹³⁰ Writing in 1993 Picq noted that the 'Manifeste de 331' was much more scandalous than the 'Manifeste de 343', examined later in the chapter, as it was men from the establishment admitting their illegal actions and calling for change.¹³¹ In comparison to DWCA, who arguably saw themselves as reformists, GIS directly challenged those in power. Yet, as in Britain, their approach was limited. As Duchén notes, they saw abortion 'in terms of what was wrong with medicine and not women'.¹³²

The *Comité* was a mixed organisation aligned with *Choisir*, made up of medical and non-medical members. In 1973 the Grenoble branch of the group published *Libérons l'avortement*, which described their illegal actions and views on abortion in France.¹³³ The Grenoble branch of *Choisir* also performed

¹²⁹Pavard 'Genre', 79-99. See also Bibia Pavard, 'Quand la pratique fait mouvement. La méthode Karman dans les mobilisations pour l'avortement libre et gratuit (1972-1975)', *Sociétés contemporaines* 85 (2012): 43-63.

¹³⁰'Le Manifeste de 331', in *Choisir, La Cause des femmes*, eds., *Le Programme Commun des femmes: présenté par Gisèle Halimi* (Bernard Grasset, 1978), 24. See also *Groupe Information Santé, Oui nous avortons!* (Git-le-Coeur, 1973).

¹³¹Picq, *Libération*, 87.

¹³²Duchén, *Feminism*, 53.

¹³³Grenoble in 1973 was also the site of a significant incident in the French abortion campaigns – the arrest of Dr. Annie Ferrey Martin. A doctor and Family Planning campaigner, Ferrey Martin was arrested for practicing abortions. This launched a debate in the feminist press over what the response should be and gave rise to many protests and meetings. See for example, Zancarini-Fournel, 'Histoire(s)', 241-252; *Choisir, La Cause des femmes, Le Procès*.

abortions even though the national group refused to, which suggests the practice of illegal abortions was fairly prevalent in Grenoble.¹³⁴ The publication highlighted the tensions within the group between medical/non-medical and male/female members. Whereas in the MLAC it was women themselves who performed the abortions, in the *Comité* there were fifteen women who were the 'intermediaries' and welcomed the women to the clinic and several male doctors/medical students who performed the abortions.

Consequently, like GIS and DWCA, their behaviour represented a form of protest against the 1920 law and not the male control of female bodies. For the medical students, their actions were part of wider global health issues, while the female members had often experienced abortion themselves. Their motivation was consequently more personal, with the aim of making female sexuality as de-stigmatised as possible, similar to feminists in both countries.¹³⁵ The women wrote how they felt relegated to a secondary role of hostess and were isolated from what was going on in the group.¹³⁶ Just as British feminist criticism of the medical establishment post-1967 centred on male power over women's bodies, the female members felt the medical students were guarding their knowledge, and dismissing women's emotional and personal experiences. As in Britain, the connections between male power, knowledge and female experience were fraught and difficult to resolve.

As mentioned, French second-wave feminism was often characterised by groups supporting the campaigns of other groups, and there were many feminists who supported the performing of illegal abortions without actually doing it themselves. For example, as noted, *Les Pétroleuses* aligned themselves with the MLAC, and argued that women performing abortions themselves showed that 'nous pouvons acquérir une certaine connaissance de notre propre corps, et comprendre et contrôler des actes de spécialistes' (we can gain some degree of knowledge of our bodies, and understand and control what medical doctors/gynecologists are doing).¹³⁷ Like the NAC and others,

¹³⁴Zancarini-Fournel, 'Histoire(s)', 241-252.

¹³⁵*Comité pour la liberté de l'avortement et de la contraception* (Grenoble), *Libérons l'avortement* (François Maspéro, 1973), 52.

¹³⁶*Ibid*, 36-38.

¹³⁷*Les Pétroleuses*, 1974, 6 (Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris, 396 PET Bul).

they also saw such actions as a way of combating class and economic inequality. For example, in an article they argued that feminists should focus on a bigger target:

Il faut principalement dénoncer la fonction de la médecine capitaliste dont les seuls buts sont: la réparation de la force du travail, le contrôle de la reproduction et donc le contrôle du corps des femmes réduit à un objet médical pour la procreation.

(First and foremost we have to denounce capitalist medicine, whose only aims are: the re-establishment of the work-force, the control of reproduction and as a result the control of 'the female body' which is reduced to an object used for procreation).¹³⁸

However, unlike the WLM, the group believed that women learning how to perform abortions themselves was the best response. Arguably it was abortion that had the strongest focus on self-help within the MLF, while in the WLM it was the rape campaigns, through the creation of the Rape Crisis Centres (see Chapter Six). It demonstrates that French feminism was more radical and practical than the common Anglo-American perception mentioned in the Introduction, and feminists were often willing to take bigger risks than their British counterparts.

However, there were others who were not happy with the illegal actions of MLAC and GIS. Although they often criticised traditional institutions as oppressive to women, and advocated separate female replacements, *Psych et Po* were critical of the two groups. For example, they claimed that the Karman method was not as painless as claimed, and the MLAC's approach did not empower women.¹³⁹ Like British feminist criticisms of the NAC, within the broader MLF, there were also some who believed an analysis of female sexual oppression and the struggles of women were being ignored, and the MLAC – in

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹*des femmes, L'alternative. Libérer nos corps ou libérer l'avortement* (éditions des femmes, 1973), 44. Written by a collective of members of *Psych et Po*.

both its structure and its activities – was incompatible with the MLF.¹⁴⁰ As Pavard notes, much of the criticism centred on the belief that, although the MLAC aligned itself with the MLF, it 'a reproduit, en son sein, des formes traditionnelles de dominations sur elles' (have reproduced within the organisation, traditional forms of domination over women').¹⁴¹ Similar to concerns in the WLM over the involvement of the TUC and male activists, some French feminists felt the purity of the movement was being diluted by the involvement of outside mixed organisations, and feminist ideas on sexuality were consequently lost. Despite this, the MLAC did make an important contribution to the decriminalisation of abortion, and feminist campaigns.

Entering the Public Sphere: From the 'Manifeste de 343' to the 'Bobigny Trial'

In both countries there were protests and marches in feminist abortion campaigns, but whereas the WLM centered on political lobbying and the involvement of the trade unions, the MLF highlighted public testimonies and the courtroom. Two very significant events were the 'Manifeste de 343' in 1971, and the so-called 'procès de Bobigny' (Bobigny Trial) in 1973.

The 'Manifeste' was a petition published in 1971 in *Le Nouvel Observateur* signed by 343 well-known French women, including Catherine Deneuve and Simone de Beauvoir, declaring they had had an abortion. In it they stated:

Un million de femmes se font avorter chaque année en France.
Elles le font dans des conditions dangereuses en raison de la clandestinité à laquelle elles sont condamnées, alors que cette opération, pratiquée sous contrôle médical, est des plus simples.
On fait le silence sur ces millions de femmes.
Je déclare que je suis l'une d'elles. Je déclare avoir avorté.

(A million women have an abortion every year in France

¹⁴⁰See for example, 'Le MLF de Rouen Texte', *Le Torchon brûle*, No.6, 1973; *des femmes, L'alternative*, 7.

¹⁴¹Pavard, *Contraception*, 422. See also Zancarini-Fournel, 'Histoire(s)', 241-252 and Picq, *Libération*, 191-221.

They do it in dangerous conditions, because they are condemned to secrecy, despite the fact that this procedure, performed under medical supervision, is one of the simplest. These women are made to be silent. I declare that I am one of them. I declare that I have had an abortion).¹⁴²

Unlike in Britain, such petitions were common in France and used to signal a political opinion.¹⁴³ The 'Manifeste de 343' was distinct in containing only female signatories and, as Jean-Francois Sirinelli notes, it was 'le premier du sexe féminin à obtenir un réel écho dans le pays' (it was the first female manifesto that achieved a genuine impact in the country).¹⁴⁴

The aim of the 'Manifeste' was to demonstrate that despite being illegal, many women had nevertheless undergone an abortion.¹⁴⁵ Unlike the British context, where public discussion of abortion arguably meant that more people were aware that abortions took place across the classes, the illegality of abortion in France meant it was often unclear how widespread it was.¹⁴⁶ Consequently, the 'Manifeste' brought abortion to greater public attention, and showed that the women had made the choice to have an abortion for themselves. As Pavard notes, what distinguished the petition was that 'il associe la cause de l'avortement à la libération des femmes et qu'il fait des femmes les actrices de leur propre libération' (it associates the abortion campaign with women's liberation, and makes women the creators of their own

¹⁴²'Le Manifeste des 343', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, April 5, 1971. Nicknamed as the 'Manifeste de 343 Salopes' (Manifesto of 343 Bitches/Sluts). The manifesto gained its nickname from a cartoon in the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* titled 'Qui a engrossé les 343 salopes du manifeste sur l'avortement?' (Who got the 343 sluts/bitches from the abortion manifesto pregnant?) See Stéphane Mazurier, *Bête, méchant et hebdomadaire. Une histoire de Charlie Hebdo (1969–1982)* (Les cahiers dessinés, 2009), 414.

¹⁴³For a good overview of the major Manifestos in France in the twentieth-century see Jean-François Sirenelli, *Intellectuels et passions françaises. Manifestes et pétitions au XXe siècle* (Fayard, 1990).

¹⁴⁴Sirenelli, *Intellectuels*, 265.

¹⁴⁵Gisèle Halimi, *La Cause des femmes* (Éditions Gallimard, 1992), 78.

¹⁴⁶For an estimate of the abortion rate from 1970-1981 see Marie-Laurence Lamy, 'Avortement et contraception vus à travers *Populations*', *Revue française de sociologie* 23:3 (1982): 519-526.

liberation).¹⁴⁷ Despite this, not all second-wave feminists were pleased with the 'Manifeste'. For example, in a 1973 article in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Fouque argued that the MLF focused too much on spectacular and provocative actions that had no concrete impact.¹⁴⁸

Despite the views of Fouque, the 'Manifeste' has been pinpointed by historians as one of the most significant events in the legalisation of abortion and the development of the MLF.¹⁴⁹ Like the TUC march in Britain, it opened up public debate on an issue that had hitherto been largely seen as a taboo, personal question. Danièle Hervieu-Léger notes it brought the topic of abortion out of the private sphere and into the public, forcing it to be considered as a political issue.¹⁵⁰ As Duchen argues, it marked the point following which abortion was 'situated in the global context of women's liberation as an essential right of all women, no longer to be considered as an unfortunate and unmentionable practical solution to individual problems'.¹⁵¹ It also influenced the MLF's campaigns and identity. For example, in an article in *Le Torchon brûle*, the petition was mentioned as a reason why women should get involved in campaigning:

De nombreuses femmes ont déjà ajouté leur signature.
Envoyez les vôtres; rejoignez les groupes de quartier déjà
formés; formez-en d'autres, à votre travail, à votre domicile [...]
Prenons la parole!

(Many women have already added their signature. Send yours;
join existing groups in your area; form new ones, at work or at
home [...] Let's speak up!)¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷Pavard, *Contraception*, 329. See also Cathy Bernheim, *Perturbation, ma soeur: Naissance d'un mouvement des femmes* (Le Felin, 2010 edition), 88-192.

¹⁴⁸Interview with Antoinette Fouque 7/01/03. Cited in Bibia Pavard, *Les éditions des femmes: Histoire des premières années 1972-1979* (L'Harmattan, 2005), 53.

¹⁴⁹See for example Pavard, *Les éditions*, 40-41; Sirenelli, *Intellectuels*, 265; Duchen, *Feminism*, 52; Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Contraception et avortement* (CNRS, 1979).

¹⁵⁰Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Féminisme en France* (Le Sycomare, 1982). See also Luc Boltanski, *La condition foetale: Une sociologie de l'engendrement et de l'avortement* (Éditions Gallimard, 2004), 220.

¹⁵¹Duchen, *Feminism*, 52-33.

¹⁵²'Appel du MLA pour l'avortement libre et gratuit', *Le Torchon brûle*, No.1, 1970.

However, arguably it was not as significant in helping legalise abortion as the 'Bobigny Trial'. The 'Manifeste' launched the political conversation on abortion, but it was the 1972 trial that converted that conversation into action.

De Beauvoir and Halimi formed *Choisir* in order to protect the signatories of the 'Manifeste' from arrest. The group was thoroughly feminist in its aims: for example, Halimi stated that 'notre axe de lutte est clair: la libération de la femme' (our central fight is clear: women's liberation), but ultimately it was a reformist organisation which attempted to use conventional channels and resources to achieve its aims.¹⁵³ At the beginning, this manifested itself through three main objectives: widespread sexual education and information on contraception, the abolition of the 1920 law, and unpaid defence of those accused of procuring or undergoing an abortion.¹⁵⁴ As Duchen notes, the relationship between *Choisir* and the MLF was often fraught, with many in the latter believing that Halimi and *Choisir* had only limited goals as regards abortion, and were not authentically feminist as they often used male testimonies in their campaigns.¹⁵⁵ They were founded because of structural reasons like the illegality of abortion, but once campaigning, shaped wider feminist actions on sexuality, leading to a stronger focus on 'test trials' than the WLM.

Through Halimi's job as a lawyer, *Choisir* became involved in the 1972 trial.¹⁵⁶ The trial received a lot of media attention in France, but was only sparsely covered by British feminist periodicals, which suggests that it was little known in WLM circles. Historians rightly point to it as an important influence

¹⁵³Halimi, *La Cause*, 85; Melanie Latham, *Regulating Reproduction: A Century of Conflict in Britain and France* (Manchester University Press, 2002), 108.

¹⁵⁴Halimi, *La Cause*, 80; Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, 1958-1974* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 707.

¹⁵⁵Duchen, *Feminism*, 54.

¹⁵⁶This will be a brief look at the trial, examining how Halimi's tactics compared to the WLM and the role of religion. For more information, see Halimi, *La Cause*; Picq, *Libération*, 191-221; Jean Gouazé et al., eds., *La loi de 1920 et l'avortement au procès de Bobigny, stratégies de la presse et du droit* (Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1979); Beryl Henderson, *Abortion, the Bobigny Affair* (Wild and Wooley, 1975).

on the subsequent legalisation of abortion.¹⁵⁷ The defendants in the Parisian trial were: Marie-Claire Chevalier, a sixteen-year-old girl raped by a classmate, who then underwent a backstreet abortion; her mother Michèle Chevalier; and her colleagues Lucette Duboucheix, Renée Sausset, and Madame Bambuck, all of whom were accused of procuring an abortion. Instead of merely defending them, Halimi turned the trial into a test case against the 1920 law and the premise that it hit working-class women harder than others. She wrote:

I wanted to denounce the hypocrisy of the law, show up religious and social taboos, received wisdoms and official reasons like the low birth rate, respect for life etc. for what they are [...] and reveal the drama of backstreet abortion and the repressive nature of class justice in an unbearable blinding light.¹⁵⁸

This allowed the defendants to become a proxy for every woman's right to bodily autonomy. For example, writing in 1992, Halimi noted; 'elles (the defendants) surent tout naturellement grandir jusqu'à devenir les porte-paroles de toutes les femmes' (they were capable of growing quite naturally to the point of becoming spokespersons for all women).¹⁵⁹ The trial attracted huge media attention and touched on everything from religion to celebrity.¹⁶⁰ It can be described as a trial that was 'à la fois banale et exemplaire' (both banal and exemplary).¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷See for example Pavard, *Contraception*, 351-361; Marwick, *Sixties*, 707.

¹⁵⁸Translated in Duchén, *Feminism*, 71.

¹⁵⁹Halimi, *Le Programme Commun*, 12.

¹⁶⁰See for example, Serge Maffert, 'Après le jugement indulgent de Bobigny, il est urgent de réviser la loi', *France Soir*, November 23, 1972; Michèle Backmann, '16 ans, enceinte et pauvre', *L'Unité*, November 13, 1972; Colette Aubry, 'Avortement faire le procès de la loi', *L'Unité*, November 10, 1972. For more information on the views of the press during the trial see Gouazé et al., *La loi*.

¹⁶¹Berger, *L'avortement*, 37.



Figure 2.3: Gisèle Halimi (centre) talking to the press outside the courtroom. On her bottom right Marie-Claire Chevalier, on her left Michèle Chevalier.¹⁶²

It was the trial of Michèle Chevalier and her supposed accomplices that became the symbol of the fight against the 1920 law.¹⁶³ For Halimi it was not Chevalier herself being judged but 'la loi au nom de laquelle elle comparaissait devant le tribunal' (the law in whose name she was appearing in court).¹⁶⁴ Pavard correctly describes the 'Bobigny Trial' as one of the most significant events in the convergence of the French left and feminist movements.¹⁶⁵ Similar to the arguments over the involvement of trade unions in British feminist campaigns, throughout the trial Halimi focused on a woman's right to control her own body, and the discrepancy between the rich and poor. While the WLM and NAC lobbied politicians and argued abortion was a basic political right of the labour movement, Halimi highlighted how the 1920 law propagated inequality. The first thing Chevalier said to the judge was 'Je suis pas coupable! C'est votre

¹⁶² *Chosir* website,

<http://www.choisirlacausedesfemmes.org/uploads/images/Gallery/procesbobigny/sc000086a7.jpg>

g
Accessed December 15, 2015.

¹⁶³ Marie-Claire Chevalier had been tried in a separate juvenile trial, and had been found not guilty, as it was decided she was influenced by others.

¹⁶⁴ *Chosir*, *Le Procès*, 9.

¹⁶⁵ Pavard, *Contraception*, 44.

loi qui est coupable!' (I am not guilty! It is your law that is guilty!)¹⁶⁶ Halimi described how when Marie-Claire first decided to have an abortion they went to a doctor who agreed to do the illegal procedure but for 4500 F, a sum Chevalier could not afford. It was the monetary value of the abortion, a sum middle-class women could easily afford, that pushed her into using a backstreet abortionist. Chevalier herself states 'quand on n'a pas d'argent, on enfreint la loi' (when you don't have money, you break the law) defining the problem in terms of class, like those in the NAC.¹⁶⁷ Yet as in Britain, arguably this evaluation simplified why women should have the right to an abortion, as it linked abortion to existing debates about economic oppression, rather than providing a fresh analysis. It disconnected it from the more original context of female sexual autonomy, presenting working-class women as victims of capitalism to be protected.

Unlike the NAC, Halimi also employed more individual testimonies to personalise her arguments. She wanted a mixture of people, from 'les spécialistes les plus éminents et en même temps des hommes et des femmes qui porteraient simplement témoignage de leur expérience quotidienne concrète' (the most eminent medical experts/gynecologists and at the same time men and women who were simply giving testimony of their practical everyday experiences), in order to demonstrate the range of people affected by the law, and the spectrum of support for the decriminalisation of abortion.¹⁶⁸ Halimi used these testimonies to show the hypocrisy of the 1920 law, but also more significantly that those who were 'pro-choice' or anti-backstreet abortions did not conform to any sort of stereotype. For example, Lucette Duboucheix, the woman Chevalier phoned after Marie-Claire decided she wanted to have an abortion, told the court how she was at first completely against the idea, due to her strong Catholic beliefs. Yet she realised it was the lesser of two evils, declaring 'le faire avorter ce n'est pas une bonne action, mais garder le bébé, ce n'est pas beaucoup mieux' (having an abortion is not a good deed but to keep the baby, that is not much better) and so gave Chevalier Bambuck's

¹⁶⁶Halimi, *La Cause*, 110.

¹⁶⁷*Choisir, Le Procès*, 43.

¹⁶⁸Halimi, *La Cause*, 90.

number to arrange an abortion.¹⁶⁹ When asked she said she would rather die than have an abortion herself, but recognised that, for certain people, abortion should be an option, and she shouldn't force her opinion on others:

Au nom de quoi, et au nom de qui, j'imposerais mes convictions aux autres femmes? Je suis pour que chaque femme choisisse librement et par conséquent si pour moi, il est clair que je n'aurais jamais avorté, je trouve tout à fait normal que celle qui a fait un choix contraire.

(In the name of what and in the name of whom should I impose my convictions on other women? I am in favour of each woman having freedom of choice and as a result if for me, it is clear that I would never have an abortion, I find it completely normal that there are others who would make the opposite choice).¹⁷⁰

A second Catholic witness whose testimony had a significant impact was the well-known doctor and researcher Prof Paul Milliez. Milliez told how he, like many other doctors, had performed abortions, despite being anti-abortion himself. He talked of 'les pauvres femmes' (the poor women) who had come to him for an abortion because they had no knowledge of contraception and had fallen pregnant.¹⁷¹ Similar to the pro-1967 Act politicians in Britain, his testimony decried the dangers and horrors of backstreet abortion, saying 'j'en ai vu mourir des dizaines qui avaient pratiqué un avortement clandestine' (I have seen dozens die after undergoing backstreet abortions).¹⁷² He placed abortion within a political context, saying 'c'est à la femme de choisir. Ce n'est pas à nous d'imposer nos conceptions d'hommes et d'hommes riches' (it is for the woman to decide. It is not up to us to impose our view as men and rich men on them).¹⁷³ His testimony was arguably significant due to his profession and gender. As Pavard notes, Milliez was seen by the press as an impartial witness, and consequently as more believable, than women who had a 'personal' stake

¹⁶⁹ *Choisir, Le Procès*, 48.

¹⁷⁰ Halimi, *La Cause*, 11.

¹⁷¹ *Choisir, Le Procès*, 69.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

in abortion being legalised.¹⁷⁴ Unlike the WLM, arguably in placing these testimonies as a central part of her argument, Halimi presented the subtleties of views on abortion. Duboucheix and Milliez's Catholicism was an advantage, as it placed a woman's right to control her own fertility in the context of Christian compassion. As highlighted earlier, for many in the WLM Catholics were associated with anti-abortionists. In France, anti-abortion organisations such as *Laissez les Vivre* were only created following the 1975 legislation. Yet France was culturally Catholic and many would have been instinctively against abortion for religious reasons. Halimi realised engaging with their disquiet head on would have the greatest impact. It was an argument the WLM was often reluctant to approach, which may have weakened its impact on many of the women it was trying to reach.

However, not everyone in the movement was happy with how Halimi argued the case and her use of personal witness testimonies.¹⁷⁵ Like the women who interrupted the TUC march, as Duchen notes, the MLF 'objected to the way that abortion was abstracted from an analysis of women's specific oppression'.¹⁷⁶ For example, some in the MLF did not agree with Halimi putting celebrities on the stand, they wanted 'les anonymes' (ordinary people) to testify and to say 'je n'ai pas de drame à vous raconter, mon ventre m'appartient' (I don't have any tragic story to tell you, my belly is my own business).¹⁷⁷ They wanted to show how ordinary women had aborted, it was an easy decision and they had not agonised over it, in contrast to Halimi's tactic of showing up middle-class hypocrisy. Similar to discussions between the WLM and NAC, there were those who saw Halimi's reformist approach as sidelining women's experiences and sexual autonomy, and replacing them with a male view of

¹⁷⁴Pavard, *Contraception*, 343. Milliez's testimony was seen as problematic by the Ordre des Médecins who instigated legal action against him because of it. See 'Le conseil national de l'ordre désapprouve l'intervention du professeur Milliez au procès de Bobigny', *Le Monde*, November 20, 1972.

¹⁷⁵See for example 'Contre choisir', *Le Torchon brûle*, No.5, 1972, 7; Pavard, *Contraception*, 355.

¹⁷⁶Duchen, *Feminism*, 54.

¹⁷⁷Halimi, *La Cause*, 95.

abortion.¹⁷⁸ For example, writing in 2003, Picq noted that some in the MLF did not want men involved in the trial and wanted Chevalier et al to say 'Vous êtes la justice bourgeoisie et la justice phallocrate! Nous ne vous connaissons [...] Condamnez-nous si vous le voulez [...] On s'en fout!' (You are bourgeois justice and male chauvinist justice! We don't recognise you [...] condemn us if you want [...] we don't care!) even though the defendants themselves did not want to.¹⁷⁹ The MLF's idea of having women disrupt the court proceedings was another source of disagreement between them and Halimi. During the trial women cried out 'Nous avons avorté – jugez nous' (We have aborted – judge us!), which Picq later argued made Halimi extremely angry as she felt she was no longer in control.¹⁸⁰

Much like the tensions amongst some in the WLM over the involvement of the TUC, these disagreements were arguably about the public representation of feminist views on sexuality and bodily autonomy, with the added tension that existed between various groups. For some in the MLF, the trial was an opportunity to gain more attention for the feminist movement, and required a confrontation with the patriarchal establishment. Conversely, just as for NAC and others, for Halimi it was a political issue of class and the aim was to convince society that the 1920 law was unworkable, not to publicise the MLF, or a feminist analysis of female sexual autonomy.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how there were multiple similarities in ideas in British and French discussions on abortion. Both grappled with questions on whether ensuring the abortion campaigns remained authentically 'feminist' was more important than a reformist approach or ensuring their demands were met. Similarly, both connected abortion to female autonomy, and discussed the relationship between women's bodies, doctors, and the state. Yet, the contrasting legal situations and national factors had a significant impact. There

¹⁷⁸See for example, 'Contraception, avortement, sexualité, réformisme', *Le Torchon brûle*, No.5, 1972.

¹⁷⁹Halimi, *La Cause*, 95. See also, 'Contraception, avortement, sexualité, réformisme'.

¹⁸⁰Picq, *Libération*, 151.

was a stronger emphasis on citizenship and motherhood in the MLF, as a result of discussions on falling birthrates, and a more explicit engagement with sexual shame and pleasure, influenced by *soixante-huitard* ideas on sexuality. The differing legal place of abortion meant that the WLM generally followed a rights-based approach, shaping their arguments in response to anti-abortionists in order to protect the 1967 Act. *Choisir*, in contrast, engaged with the nuances of religion and abortion, to ensure that abortion was decriminalised. This led to confrontation with some in the MLF, who were unhappy with the lack of focus on female sexual autonomy. It also led French feminists to engage with questions of illegality and criminality to a much greater extent than in Britain. As a result, there were more calls for self-help by MLAC and *Les Pétroleuses*, in comparison to the WLM and NAC, who lobbied politicians, and worked with trade unions. Finally, the actions of MLAC and *Choisir* also demonstrated that the French feminist movement was more than just theory: they could be pragmatic too. Overall, then, in both countries it was national factors and contexts that led to the distinctions in feminist action and discussion, despite similarities in themes.

Chapter Three: Lesbianism

Establishing sexuality as a political issue was one of the most innovative aspects of women's liberation in Britain and France. More than any other topic of sexuality, it was lesbianism that led to tensions within feminist circles, as it gave rise to hot debates over the extent to which an individual's sexual identity could be re-shaped by political activism or personal choice. Feminist debates on lesbianism often focused on what did or did not make a feminist, framing sexual practices as a judgment on feminist identity. In both movements, significant elements of the feminist discussion on lesbianism included: the connections between sexual practices and politics, heterosexuality and feminism, and sexuality as a base for collective political identity. However, whereas in Britain connections between lesbian feminists and male gay liberation activists were often weak, and lesbianism more divisive within the WLM; in the MLF a core issue for lesbian feminists was whether they were part of the women's or gay liberation movement or could be part of both. This chapter will briefly compare these elements, alongside the rise of political lesbianism in each country, by examining several articles written on the topic in the late-1970s/early-1980s. This will help facilitate an analysis of the significance of discussions on lesbianism, feminism and political identity to each movement, and the extent to which contrasting social or political contexts shaped these debates. With regard to the terminology used in this chapter, the terms 'political lesbian' and 'radical lesbian' refer to lesbians who advocated separatism in Britain and France respectively. The term 'lesbian feminist' refers to lesbians who did not identify with political lesbianism.

The Broader Context of Lesbianism in British and French Society

Arguably, the discussion on the history of homosexuality in Britain and France can be separated into two strands: the legal history, and the cultural construction of social attitudes towards homosexuality. In both cases, there

were marked differences between male homosexuality and lesbianism. In Britain and France, indeed across many Western nations in the last few centuries, there were clearer guidelines in society about punishment for sodomy and homosexuality, which were viewed as more dangerous than lesbianism.¹ However, the path to legalisation in each country differed. In 1791 France became the first European country to decriminalise same-sex sexual relationships. Jeffrey Merrick and Bryant T. Ragan note that this implies the country was more tolerant of homosexual relationships than her European neighbours.² Merrick and Ragan also note that less work has been done on the history of homosexuality in France than in other countries, as 'French scholars have generally believed that France has a unified national culture, despite the obvious division within their society'.³

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Offences Against the Persons Act of 1861 removed the death penalty for specific homosexual acts, although these acts remained illegal, and were punishable by imprisonment.⁴

¹Bryant T. Ragan, 'The Enlightenment Confronts Homosexuality', in *Homosexuality in Modern France*, eds. Jeffrey Merrick and Bryant T. Ragan (Oxford University Press, 2011), 45. See also Julie Peakman, *The Pleasure's All Mine: A History of Perverse Sex* (Reaktion Books, 2013), 109.

²Merrick and Ragan, *Homosexuality*, 1. See also Scott Gunther, *The Elastic Closet: A History of Homosexuality in France, 1942–Present*, (Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

³Ibid. See also Anne-Claire Rebreyend, 'Comment écrire l'histoire des sexualités au XXe siècle? Bilan historiographique comparé français/anglo-américain' *CLIO: Femmes, Genre, Histoire* 22 (2005): 185-209, which compares French and Anglo-American historiography around gender and sexuality.

⁴Offences Against the Person Act 1861

Section 61. 'Whoever shall be convicted of the abominable Crime of Buggery, committed either with Mankind or with any Animal, shall be liable, at the Discretion of the Court, to be kept in Penal Servitude for Life or for any Term not less than Ten Year'.

Section 62. 'Whomsoever shall attempt to commit said abominable Crime, or shall be guilty of an Assault with Intent to commit the same, or of any indecent Assault upon any Male Person, shall be guilty of a Misdemeanour, and being convicted thereof shall be liable, at the Discretion of the Court, to be kept in Penal Servitude for any Term not exceeding Ten Years and not less than Three Years, or to be imprisoned for any Term not exceeding Two Years, with or without Hard Labour'.

The Labouchere Amendment, or Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 made 'gross indecency' illegal, but Victorian morality prevented a concrete definition of what constituted 'gross indecency' from being applied.⁵ It was this Act that was the basis of the convictions of Oscar Wilde and Alan Turing in 1895 and 1952 respectively. In 1967 the Sexual Offences Act decriminalised consensual homosexual acts in private between two men over the age of 21 in England and Wales.⁶ In Scotland homosexuality remained illegal, and would not be decriminalised until 1980.⁷

All this legislation referred only to male homosexual acts such as sodomy. Same-sex relationships between women in both countries were never explicitly illegal, and consequently, for lesbians, the issue was one of visibility. As Emma Healey notes, 'ironically gay men's sexuality is actually recognised and its validity stressed by the legal oppression that it brings'.⁸ Gay men had to campaign for legal recognition of their relationships; lesbians for their relationships to be validated or believed. This difference affected how lesbians and gays discussed their sexuality and its place in society. Jill C. Humphrey rightly notes the split as between gender and sexuality. For Humphrey, lesbians

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/24-25/100/crossheading/unnatural-offences/enacted>
Accessed December 13, 2015.

⁵Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885

Section 11. 'Any male person, who in public and private, commits, or is party to the commission of, or procures, or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency with an other male person, shall be guilty of a misdemeanour and being convicted thereof, shall be liable at the discretion of the Court to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour'.

www.swarb.co.uk/acts/1885Criminal_Law_AmendmentAct.shtml

Accessed December 13, 2015.

⁶The Sexual Offences Act 1967

Section 1. 'Notwithstanding any statutory or common law provision, but subject to the provisions of the next following section, a homosexual act in private shall not be an offence provided that the parties consent thereto and have attained the age of twenty-one years.'

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/60/enacted Accessed December 13, 2015.

⁷For more information on the history of homosexuality in Scotland see Jeffrey Meek, *Queer Voices in Post-War Scotland: Male Homosexuality, Religion and Society*, (Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

⁸Emma Healey, *Lesbian Sex Wars* (Virago Press, 1996), 16.

experienced gender oppression and therefore come from a 'position of political and epistemological privilege in determining the ultimate meanings of gender equality'.⁹ Conversely, gay men experienced 'the ultimate horrors of sexual oppression', which seemingly made them uniquely able to define 'the ultimate parameters of sexual emancipation'.¹⁰ As will be seen, a desire by gay men for a more explicit 'sexual liberation' than their lesbian feminist counterparts existed in both countries.

The social construction of homosexuality was also significant. As Michel Foucault argues in *The History of Sexuality*, historically sodomy and homosexuality were viewed as merely criminal acts, and did not define a person's identity. Sodomists were seen to be indulging in a vice, akin to drinking, and not viewed as different from other men.¹¹ It was from the nineteenth-century onwards, as the ideas of psychologists and sexologists became more popular, that homosexuality was viewed as a separate identity from heterosexuality, one based on sexual behaviour. In common with the legal context noted above, ideas on lesbianism were slightly different, although the underlying idea of homosexuality as a form of deviancy or madness can be found in both. The sexologist Havelock Ellis was one of the first to categorise female same-sex attraction, viewing it as a form of insanity.¹² For Ellis, women who remained sexually attracted to women throughout their life were a 'third sex' who rejected the dominant ideal of femaleness.¹³

The notion of a third classification for lesbians also existed within some women's liberation discussions. For example, as will be seen later in the chapter, the work of the French feminist theorist Monique Wittig, who argued that lesbians could not be placed within the traditional male/female binary, was significant in debates around lesbianism and identity within the MLF. Likewise, some British revolutionary feminists argued that lesbians should be viewed as a

⁹Jill C. Humphrey, 'Cracks in the Feminist Mirror? Research and Reflections on Lesbians and Gay Men Working Together', *Feminist Review* 66 (2000): 104

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ragan, 'The Enlightenment', 45.

¹²Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in 20th-Century America* (Columbia University Press, 1981), 241.

¹³Ibid.

separate category since they did not have sex with men. Authors such as Sheila Jeffreys, and to a lesser extent Lillian Faderman, have viewed the work of sexologists like Ellis as one of the major contributors to the stigmatisation and censure of female same-sex sexual relationships.¹⁴ This is similar to Foucault's notion that medical and sexological definitions of sexuality were part of the emerging social control of the body.¹⁵ On the other hand, although acknowledging this, Jeffrey Weeks argues that sexologists like Ellis 'did not so much invent the homosexual or the lesbian as attempt to put into their own characteristic pathologizing language changes that were taking place before their eyes'.¹⁶ How lesbianism was socially constructed and defined was an important issue for second-wave feminists in both Britain and France, and the central disagreement came down to whether lesbianism should be defined as a sexual attraction to women, or a political choice stemming from a conscious desire to reject men.

Britain

Lesbianism and Gay Liberation

The majority of historians of gay rights trace the Western gay liberation movements back to the Stonewall Riots of 1969. These were a series of spontaneous demonstrations by the gay community against police raids in Greenwich Village in New York. The riots were a catalyst for gays and lesbians in the United States and Europe to form activist groups and start campaigning

¹⁴See Faderman, *Odd Girls*; Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930* (Spinfex Press, 2003); id., *The Lesbian Heresy: A Feminist Perspective on the Lesbian Sexual Revolution* (Spinfex Press, 1993). For a radical feminist analysis of the social construction of lesbianism see also Celia Kitzinger, *The Social Construction of Lesbianism* (SAGE Publications, 1989).

¹⁵See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (Vintage, 1990 edition).

¹⁶Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality* (Psychology Press, 2003 2nd Edition), 31. See also id., *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulations of Sexuality since 1800* (Routledge, 2014), 184-188; *Making Sexual History* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013).

for better treatment and rights. Britain and France were not immune to this wave of activism. However, the gay liberation groups in each country had contrasting influences on and relationships with the feminist groups, the two parallel movements being arguably more closely intertwined in France.

In Britain, following the Stonewall events, the activist group *The North-Western Committee of the Homosexual Law Reform Society* reconstituted itself as the *Campaign for Homosexual Equality* in 1969, and by 1972 had attracted 60 local groups across the country.¹⁷ In 1970 the British wing of the *Gay Liberation Front* was formed, and as Barry D. Adam notes, like its American counterpart, it evolved through 'high energy consciousness-raising groups into a collection of workshops focusing on anti-homosexual practices in psychiatry, religious denominations and government'.¹⁸ The GLF contained both male and female members, and some historians, like Bridget Lockyer, have argued that the GLF influenced sections of the WLM.¹⁹ Lockyer argues that the existence of the 'Bradford Dykes' no doubt demonstrated a crossover in membership between the GLF and WLM, although she does not present explicit evidence of any connections.²⁰ However, arguably overall in Britain there was little cohesion within the GLF and a weaker connection to the WLM, in comparison to the French movement. For example, there were fewer joint protests and campaigns by the two groups than in France and, unlike their French counterparts, British lesbian feminists arguably felt less allegiance to the GLF. Like its equivalents in France and the United States, the GLF soon broke apart following infighting between lesbian feminists and gay men. The situation in France was perhaps more toxic, but there were similarities on both sides of the Channel. Within the GLF, as Adam notes, there were two opposing views on the origin of

¹⁷ Barry D. Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement* (Twayne Publishers, 1995), 89. See also Lucy Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain: How the Personal got Political* (Manchester University Press, 2007).

¹⁸ Adam, *The Rise*, 90.

¹⁹ Bridget Lockyer, 'An Irregular Period? Participation in the Bradford Women's Liberation Movement', *Women's History Review* 22 (2013): 649-650.

²⁰ Ibid.

oppression against homosexuals. For lesbian feminists and 'effeminists'²¹ male domination was the problem, while for male gay activists sexual repression and the nuclear family were to blame.²²

In Britain and France, some lesbians were also upset by what they saw as gay men's inherent misogyny. In both countries, lesbian feminists disagreed with how some gay liberation activists approached heterosexual and homosexual sex, seeing their arguments as lacking any nuance of the realities of power dynamics. For example, writing in 2003, Jeffreys noted how some lesbians were upset with gay men being in drag, and 'liberation' for them was too masculine, and only about having as much sex as possible.²³ Writing in 2000 about lesbian activism within women's liberation, Humphrey notes that for many lesbians 'the gay male psyche is as perverse as that of straight men, if not more so, and gay male politics is as oppressive to women as compulsory heterosexuality, if only indirectly'.²⁴ This tension between gay activists and lesbian feminists existed in both countries. It caused many lesbians to turn from the gay liberation movement towards the emerging second-wave feminist movement for a space in which to campaign and discuss their views on their sexuality. This implied that for many lesbian feminists, shared gender was often initially a strong enough bond for collective campaigning to combat male oppression, even if there were differences in sexual identity.

The Right to A Self-Defined Sexuality

As feminist conversations focused on the politicisation of the female body and its perception, it was unsurprising that some women in Britain and France connected sexuality and political identity. In Britain, the inclusion of the Sixth

²¹This was the term used for gay liberation activists who attempted to question male privilege alongside their homosexual identity. For an example of the views of the American group *Effeminists* see Steve Dansky, John Knoebel and Kenneth Pitchford, 'The Effeminist Manifesto' (1973), in *We Are Everywhere: A Historical Sourcebook of Gay and Lesbian Politics*, eds. Mark Blasisus and Shane Phelan (Psychology Press, 1997), 435-438.

²²Adam, *The Rise*, 90.

²³Sheila Jeffreys, *Unpacking Queer Politics: A Lesbian Feminist Perspective* (Polity Press, 2003), 16-17. See also Sue Lees and Celia Cowie, 'Slags or Drags', *Feminist Review* 9 (1981): 17-31.

²⁴Humphrey, 'Cracks', 103.

Demand, 'The Right to a Self-Defined Sexuality. An End to Discrimination Against Lesbians' at the 1974 Edinburgh Conference, presented sexual autonomy as necessary for women's liberation. Just as with pornography and rape, the American WLM was also a significant influence on discussions on lesbianism. For example, alongside the 'Sixth Demand', Rees also points to the formation of the group *Radicalesbians* in the United States as significant for British feminists, as it meant the British movement already had a 'pre-existing lesbian stream of thought' before the WLM really took off.²⁵

The Demand connected sexuality to a woman's identity; framing it as something women could control and define themselves. Consequently, various discussions occurred as women began to examine their own sexual behaviour through the prism of their politics. For some, this manifested itself in a move away from 'traditional' penetrative sex. For example, Beatrix Campbell recently described how, when she first read 'The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm', she threw it across the room because it was too dangerous, and meant she would have to completely rethink her sexuality.²⁶ In both countries, the legacy of the 'permissive society' and the supportive environment many found within feminism also led to the realisation that another sexual identity was possible. For example, in an oral history interview, Barbara Jones discussed how she had no idea what a lesbian was until becoming involved with the WLM, explaining that she 'suddenly realised that if that could be so different and I hadn't a clue, everything could be totally opposite to what I thought [...] It was like freedom'.²⁷ For others, this caused them to experiment with their sexuality without any

²⁵Jeska Rees, 'Taking your Politics Seriously: Lesbian History and the Women's Liberation Movement in England', in *Sapphists and Sexologists: Histories of Sexualities Volume 2*, eds. Sonja Tiernan and Mary McAuliffe (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 94. In 1970, Betty Friedan, the author of *The Feminine Mystique*, and founder of the *National Organization for Women* (NOW), described lesbianism as the 'lavender menace'. *Radicalesbians* were formed in 1970 as a result, in order to protest against Friedan.

²⁶Beatrix Campbell interviewed by Margaretta Jolly for The Sisterhood and After Project, 6-7/09/13 (The British Library, C1420/01), 53.

²⁷Barbara Jones interviewed by Margaretta Jolly for The Sisterhood and After Project, 3/03/12 (The British Library, C1420/53), 53. See also Sarah F. Browne *The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland, c.1968–c.1979* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Dundee, 2009), 193-194.

drastic change of sexual identity. For example, Lesley Abdela described how she had sex with both men and women but considered herself heterosexual, as that was just 'part of the sixties'.²⁸ Catherine Hall said she 'was bisexual for quite a long period [...] and that was absolutely to do with the kinds of friendships and emotional connections that I developed in the women's movement'.²⁹ Amanda Sebestyen, a self-identified radical feminist who now has a male partner, also had sexual relationships with women, allegedly including the French feminist Christine Delphy at the same time as Delphy was having a relationship with Sheila Jeffreys.³⁰

Although many women were experimenting with their sexual identity within the movement, this did not equate to widespread acceptance of lesbianism. As in France, many lesbian members of the WLM felt there was an underlying homophobia within the movement. For example, Barbara Jones claimed she wanted to discuss lesbian identity in an Islington cr group, but felt tension from 'straight' women in the group who did not want to discuss it, so left and joined a lesbian cr group.³¹ In a recent oral history interview, Michelle Ryan defined herself as bisexual, but claimed that in the women's movement in London this was seen as 'having the best of both worlds'.³² Campbell recalled how, although she believed there was a 'sexual frisson at all the conferences', at the Bristol Conference people were uncomfortable with women embracing and taking their tops off at the disco.³³ In a 1982 issue of *Spare Rib*, a reader wrote in to question why there was 'so much on lesbians in it' adding, 'they are in a minority, and if you want to reach more readers, surely you shouldn't

²⁸Lesley Abdela interviewed by Margaretta Jolly for The Sisterhood and After Oral History Project, 13/03/11 (The British Library, C1420/13), 179.

²⁹Catherine Hall interviewed by Rachel Cohen for The Sisterhood and After Oral History Project, 16/04/12 (The British Library, C1420/54), 59.

³⁰Amanda Sebestyen interviewed by Margaretta Jolly for The Sisterhood and After Project, 30/03/12 (The British Library, C1420/52), 64.

³¹Jones Interview, 75. See also Sandra McNeill Oral History interviewed by Anna Gurun, 17/05/12, 23.

³²Michelle Ryan interviewed by Rachel Cohen for The Sisterhood and After Oral History Project, 25/10/11 (The British Library, C1420/35), 78

³³Campbell Interview, 55.

publish so much about them'.³⁴ In the collective's response they noted that 'you are by no means the only reader to write to us in these terms', although they were puzzled about the articles mentioned, as *Spare Rib* had published no more than half a dozen features on lesbians in over a hundred issues.³⁵ They argued they wanted to reach more lesbian readers, and as there was such a silence about the experiences of lesbian women, they wanted to show the difficulties that having to hide your lover, or being discriminated against as a result of your sexuality, could have on a woman.³⁶ Arguably, although the collective supported a broader and deeper discussion of lesbian issues, the original letter and their response highlighted one of the main reasons why lesbian and heterosexual feminists often disagreed – contrasting life experiences.³⁷ As occurred in the prostitution debates (see Chapter Five), some feminists in both countries were uncomfortable with discussing aspects of sexuality outside of their own experiences.

Unlike in the MLF, the conference structure meant that a wider spectrum of British feminists gathered more frequently, outside of demonstrations. Arguably this provided more opportunity for disagreements or fights between currents, as the conferences aimed to decide on the future actions of the WLM. Disagreements emerged between radical/revolutionary feminists, who believed the movement should focus on eradicating 'male supremacy' and separatism, and others, came to a head at the 1978 Birmingham conference. This was the

³⁴Editorial', *Spare Rib*, No.116, March 1982, 3-4.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷See also Sue Cartledge and Susan Hemmings, 'How did we get this way?' *Spare Rib*, No.86, September 1979, 43-47, which examined the life experiences of lesbians.

last to be held, and much of the historiography on the movement describes it as when the WLM began to splinter and weaken.³⁸

The problems arose following a proposal by the *Bristol Women's Liberation Group* for the Sixth Demand to be split into two, with the section 'the right of all women to define their sexuality' becoming a principle preceding all other demands.³⁹ The motion was passed but only following vitriolic arguments and recriminations.⁴⁰ Some lesbian and radical/revolutionary feminists were angry at what they perceived as a dismissal of the subject, while some socialist feminists saw the events as dogmatic attempts by revolutionary feminists to force their opinions on the conference.⁴¹ In an oral history interview, Catherine Hall described the 1978 conference as bitter and sectarian, with shouting matches between women over the issue of lesbian separatism, arguing this conference was the turning point for the movement.⁴² Sue O'Sullivan echoed

³⁸See, for example, Lynne Segal, *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism* (Virago Press, 1987), 56; Barbara Caine, *English Feminism, 1780–1980* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 267; Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movements in Britain, 1914–1999* (Palgrave MacMillan, 1992), 331; Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation* (Picador Press, 1987), 245. Setch disputes this view, arguing there were disillusionments at earlier conferences, see Eve Grace Setch, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Britain 1969–79: Organisation, Creativity and Debate* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2000), 72–74.

³⁹Lesbian Left-Birmingham and the Sixth Demand, 'Conference paper from the London Area Women's Liberation Conference', June 1978, in *No Turning Back: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement 1975–80*, eds. Feminist Anthology Collective (The Women's Press, 1981), 172.

⁴⁰See David Bouchier, *The Feminist Challenge: The Movement for Women's Liberation in Britain and the United States* (Palgrave MacMillan, 1983), 132; Amy Brackx, Gail Chester and Sara Rance, 'How We Oppress Each Other', *Spare Rib*, No.70, May 1978, 17.

⁴¹Jeska Rees, 'A Look Back at Anger: The Women's Liberation Movement in 1978', *Women's History Review* 19:3 (2010): 341. See also Sheila Jeffreys, 'A Revolutionary Feminist View of the Conference', *WIRES*, No.50, 1978, 17–18.

⁴²Hall interview, 57. See also 'Conference', *Spare Rib*, No.71, June 1978, 26–28, a series of letters from mainly socialist feminists to *Spare Rib*, which highlighted the conference as a serious point for the unity of the movement.

this in a recent oral history interview, pointing to lesbianism as the flashpoint for the arguments.⁴³

As Rees notes, the vague wording of the 'right of all women to define their sexuality' meant many women were unclear on what the vote was for, and what exactly was meant by a 'self-defined sexuality', leading to discussion on the topic in issues of *Spare Rib* and *WIRES*.⁴⁴ In addition, there were some feminists who did not believe the right to define one's own sexuality was the most important principle of the movement. For example, in a 1978 paper from the London Area WL Conference, the speaker argued such a move implied that male oppression was the bigger problem, not class oppression.⁴⁵ The paper's authors also argued that not all lesbians were happy with the 'Sixth Demand' being viewed as the 'lesbian demand', as this implied it was due to an 'irrational prejudice of society', and not linked to 'the suppression of women's sexuality generally and to the insistence that women should be passive'.⁴⁶ Unlike in France, the events of the 1978 conference demonstrated that when discussing sexuality and the WLM's response, there were fairly clear splits between groups and individuals across of the wider spectrum of currents, which impacted on the cohesiveness of the movement.

'Feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice'

Feminists in both movements questioned whether women should cut off all sexual and emotional relationships with men in order to remain authentically feminist. Writing in 1993, Jeffreys described how revolutionary feminists and political lesbians 're-labeled lesbianism as a healthy choice for women based upon self-love, the love of other women and the rejection of male oppression.

⁴³Sue O'Sullivan interviewed by Margaretta Jolly for The Sisterhood and After Project, 13/01/12 (The British Library, C1420/40), 124.

⁴⁴Rees, 'A Look Back', 343. See for example, Birmingham Women's Liberation Conference Planning Group, 'National Women's Liberation Conference', *WIRES*, No.58, 1978, 58; Pam Isherwood, 'Letter to Spare Rib', *Spare Rib*, No.71, June 1978, 34; Joanna Ryan, 'What is a self-defined sexuality?', *Spare Rib*, No.59, June 1977, 22-23.

⁴⁵'Lesbian Left', 172. See also Ann, 'Report from Plenary', *WIRES*, No.48, 1978, 19-20; 'Conference', 26.

⁴⁶'Lesbian Left', 172.

Any woman could be a lesbian'.⁴⁷ Of course, the importance of women organising autonomously existed from the start of the WLM, but lesbian separatists took these ideas further, connecting sexual behaviour to female autonomy. For Jeffreys, among others, lesbianism was firstly a 'choice' made by women, and one not necessarily based on a same-sex sexual attraction, but politics: the rejection of men. While this debate between essentialism and constructionism was often more widespread within French second-wave feminism as a result of *Psych et Po*, in presenting lesbianism as a choice, political lesbians in both countries described sexuality as something controllable, and a base for political actions against male oppression.

A significant event in Britain was the 1979 publication of a conference paper by the *Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group* (LRFG) called 'Political Lesbianism: The Case Against Heterosexuality'. Revolutionary feminism had a particularly notable presence in Leeds.⁴⁸ Much like in France, where political lesbianism was mainly discussed by feminists associated with a specific journal, it was this paper from one group that launched the discussion. The Leeds paper contained a section setting out their argument, and then a series of 'questions and answers' from a hypothetical fictional heterosexual feminist. In the paper they argued that all feminists 'can and should be political lesbians', which they defined as a "'woman identified woman'"⁴⁹ who does not fuck men. It does not mean compulsory sexual activity with women'.⁵⁰ Indeed, they discussed later in the paper how lesbians who work with men on the left 'are not woman identified and gain privileges through associating with men and putting forward ideas which are only mildly acceptable to male left ideology', so for the writers being

⁴⁷ Jeffreys, *Heresy*, viii.

⁴⁸ See also Lockyer, 'Irregular Period', 643-657; Finn Mackay, *Radical Feminism: Feminist Activism in Movement* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), which examines the influence of radical Leeds feminists on the RTN marches.

⁴⁹ The term 'woman identified woman' comes from a text distributed by the American group *Radicalesbians* in 1970, at the time of the 'lavender menace' scare. In it, they argued that lesbian women's identification with other women defied traditional definitions of woman's identity as being connected to male sexual partners.

⁵⁰ Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, 'Political Lesbianism: The Case Against Heterosexuality 1979', in *Love Your Enemy: The Debate Between Heterosexual Feminism and Political Lesbianism* (OnlyWomen Press, 1981), 1.

sexually attracted to women was insufficient without the necessary political ideology or separatist behaviour.⁵¹

The paper is split into sections on the heterosexual couple, penetration, and the function of penetration. Unlike the MLF, where discussion on lesbianism was often more abstract within the WLM there was arguably more focus on the sexual act. The writers argued that heterosexuality was the most effective and efficient way of maintaining male control over women; sensationally claiming it was 'more efficient than keeping women in ghettos, camps or even sheds at the bottom of the garden'.⁵² The use of heightened and emotive political language including 'ghettos', 'sexual terrorists', or 'camps' was far from uncommon in British revolutionary feminist tracts, particularly around subjects like prostitution and rape, arguably because of the political connotation of such terms and the influence of theories of 'sex-class' (see Chapters Five and Six). The Leeds paper argued that any woman who was part of a heterosexual couple 'helps to shore up male supremacy by making its foundation stronger'. The central argument, frequently returned to, was that men as a 'class' maintained their power over women through sexual relationships, particularly penetration. Perhaps building on the ideas about female sexuality from Koedt's 'The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm' and cr groups, they argued that penetration was not necessary to the sexual pleasure of women or men.⁵³ They reach a radical conclusion from this, arguing that any woman who 'engages in penetration bolsters the oppressor and reinforces the class power of men', and its 'function and effect is the punishment and control of women'.⁵⁴ However, they contradicted themselves by arguing that even if you do not have penetrative sex with your boyfriend, you are still 'reinforcing his class power'.⁵⁵ The confusion over whether the more significant problem was penetrative sex or sexual intercourse with a man can also be seen in the lack of

⁵¹Ibid., 9.

⁵²Ibid., 6.

⁵³Ibid., 7.

⁵⁴Ibid., 7. See also Beatrix Campbell, 'A Feminist Sexual Politics: Now You See It, Now You Don't', *Feminist Review* 5 (1980): 15 for a discussion of the history of framing penetration as an invasion of the female body in feminist debates.

⁵⁵Leeds Group, 'Political Lesbianism', 7.

engagement with what lesbians having penetrative sex would mean. Like the split within *Questions Féministes*, which will be examined below, for the authors of the Leeds Paper, sexual behaviour and sexuality were core elements of political activism, and therefore any woman who remained in a sexual relationship with men bolstered the oppression of women. For example, they wrote: 'lesbianism is a necessary political choice, part of the tactics of our struggle', adding that 'heterosexual women are collaborators with the enemy'.⁵⁶ As Weeks notes, in this context 'lesbianism was no longer simply and straightforwardly a sexual preference and identity that had been historically denied', but rather 'the essence of womanhood, and a necessary form of resistance to hegemonic hetero-patriarchy'.⁵⁷ This belief that sexual pleasure cannot be separated from dominant power structures was prevalent in other debates on sexual issues in both countries, as feminists wanted to explore the broader context of gender and sexual relations (see Chapter Four), but was arguably strongest in these discussions.

The presentation of heterosexuality as a political structure oppressive to women by the paper was echoed in radical feminist discussions in France and other countries. For example, an influential 1980 essay by the American feminist Adrienne Rich described heterosexuality as a violent political institution that controlled and constricted women, and presented lesbianism as a way for women to overthrow this oppression, while Monique Wittig presented similar arguments in France.⁵⁸ The arguments in the paper imply that any woman in a sexual relationship with a man ceases to be an individual; both she and the man are instead representatives of a 'class', of oppressor and oppressed, and so any agency is lost.

In a recent oral history interview Ann Oakley noted that 'anybody who was seriously involved in all of that [the WLM] had to seriously, should consider, should I become a lesbian for political reasons?' so it cannot be said the LRFG

⁵⁶Ibid., 9.

⁵⁷Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulations of Sexuality since 1800* (Routledge, 2014), 363.

⁵⁸See Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' in id., *Blood, Bread and Poetry* (Norton Paperback, 1994); id., 'Reflections on Compulsory Heterosexuality', *Journal of Women's History* 16 (2004): 9-11.

were advocating a completely new idea. Sexuality as a marker of feminism, and lesbianism as the feminist default, had existed within the WLM before the Leeds paper. For example, the 1974 serialisation by the Women's Liberation Workshop Newsletter of 'The CLIT statement', a lesbian separatist text originally published in the American publication *Off Our Backs*, was another controversial separatist text that led to heated discussion.⁵⁹ The text described straight women as 'men in disguise' and how they 'come on like male transvestite femme drag queens'.⁶⁰ Many socialist feminists felt the text received too little criticism, and as a result some heterosexual women went on the defensive about their sexuality and feminism.⁶¹ Despite this, even though the ideas in the Leeds paper were not new, the document was very influential and gave rise to a great deal of heated debate in the WLM.

Generally speaking, the arguments against the Leeds paper and by extension lesbian separatism fell into two main groups: what it said about the relationship of heterosexual women and men to the movement, and how it defined lesbian sexuality. This is a simplistic distinction and the two arguments did overlap, but it remains apt. In letters written to WIRES in response to the paper, many women responded angrily to what they considered was the LRFG's attempts to tell women what to do and ignore the personal experiences of individual women. For example, in a 1982 letter, Frankie Rickford stated that it was the first time she had seen 'feminists directly deny the principle that every woman's experience is real and valid'.⁶² In 1983, Sophie Laws – who self-identified as a radical feminist – wrote that the paper was not 'pro-woman' and 'contained no real personal openness, no risk – one might think these women were automatons'.⁶³ Laws also added that 'somehow they reduce the whole structure of male supremacy to fucking. Withdrawing sexual service from men

⁵⁹See Setch, *Women's Liberation*, 44-45.

⁶⁰Campbell, 'Sexual Politics', 14-15.

⁶¹Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 242-245. See also Susan Ardill and Sue O'Sullivan, 'Upsetting an Applecart: Difference, Desire and Lesbian Sadomasochism', *Feminist Review* 80 (2005): 104-105; Caine, *English Feminism*, 267; Sheila Rowbotham, *The Past is Before Us: Feminism in Action Since the 1960s* (Pandora Press, 1989), 10.

⁶²Frankie Rickford, 'Letter to WIRES', in *Love your enemy?*, 11.

⁶³Sophie Laws, 'Letter to WIRES 1983', in *Love your enemy?*, 13.

becomes the total strategy – how exactly this will bring them to their knees is not explained', and feminists need to look at why women do certain things and not 'bully them out of their silly ideas'.⁶⁴ In a 1984 letter Penny Cloutte argued that the authors had no right to tell another woman what they experienced as sexual pleasure, and 'the Leeds sisters, like many sexist men, seem to fail to distinguish between rape (penetration without consent) and pleasurable hetero lovemaking'.⁶⁵ Just as in the MLF, where some women argued there was a hierarchy of sexualities, with lesbianism at the top, some British feminists were likewise concerned that the framing of sexuality as a political act negatively impacted how feminists discussed heterosexual pleasure. For example, writing in 1980 Campbell wrote that heterosexual feminists felt like 'the Fifth Form remove, the bad girls who smoke in the changing room and go with men', and that 'heterosexuality has to feature in our politics as more than a guilty secret'.⁶⁶ Campbell also argued that the focus on penetration as a form of colonisation 'foreclosed any programme of struggle in heterosexual practice', and meant the opportunity for an honest conversation by heterosexual women around sexual behaviour was lost.⁶⁷ For Campbell, early critiques of heterosexuality and focus on creating new forms of sexual pleasure by feminists were thwarted by later discussions around separatism.⁶⁸ Writing in 1993, Wendy Clark stated how sexual activities and behaviours were measured against feminist rhetoric, and women were found wanting if these behaviours did not follow 'the new straight road'.⁶⁹ This was not limited to lesbianism, and similar concerns were voiced by some about the feminist discussions on pornography and prostitution (see Chapters Four and Five).

These letters demonstrated the difficulty in applying political theory to sexual pleasure, and basing an individual's feminist credentials on their

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Penny Cloutte, 'Letter to WIRES 1984', in *Love your enemy?*, 15.

⁶⁶Campbell, 'Sexual Politics', 1. See also Lynne Segal, *Straight Sex: Rethinking the Politics of Pleasure* (Virago Press, 1994), where Segal challenged lesbianism as necessary to become an authentic feminist, and heterosexuality as the base for male oppression of women.

⁶⁷Campbell, 'Sexual Politics', 15.

⁶⁸Ibid., 3.

⁶⁹Wendy Clark, 'The Dyke, the Feminist and the Devil', *Feminist Review* 11 (1982): 33.

personal sexual experiences. Rees argues that the response to the Leeds paper should be viewed as part of 'lesbian history', not the history of the WLM, and the response symbolised the underlying homophobia within the movement.⁷⁰ Rees believes the paper 'was one of many flashpoints over the course of the 1970s in which lesbian women attempted to expose what they termed the "heterosexual privilege" enjoyed by straight women'.⁷¹ Certainly feminist discussion on lesbianism could – indeed should – be viewed within a different context, and a latent homophobia did exist in the movement. Despite this, arguably the response to the Leeds paper was not an example of just this. For the women writing these letters, the problem was others trying to impose a political ideology onto their own personal sexual experiences. Forcing the political onto the personal was, in this case, seen by some to be bullying and counterproductive, as it denied the validity of contrasting female experiences.

Lesbian Sexual Practices and Politics

As Browne notes, the divisions over lesbian separatism in the WLM were not as simple as socialist versus radical lesbian.⁷² In both countries, many lesbians also identified as socialist feminists, and not all were happy framing their sexuality as solely based on a rejection of men. Whereas in the MLF, criticism of separatism often highlighted oppressions shared by straight and gay women, and questioned whether a separate lesbian identity was required, critics in the WLM examined lesbian sexual behaviour and desire. Arguably this was because of the relative influence of the Leeds paper, as British lesbian feminists felt the need to speak out against the framing of their sexuality encountered in the text. Writing in 1982, for example, Clark stated that 'My criticism of men does not equal lesbianism. My desires and my sexual practice are not

⁷⁰Rees, 'Taking your Politics', 93. See also Browne, *Women's Liberation*, 195-197 where Browne discusses accusations of homophobia in the Scottish movement.

⁷¹Rees, 'Taking your Politics', 88.

⁷²Browne, *Women's Liberation*, 192. See also Ardill and O'Sullivan, 'Upsetting an Applecart', 98-99, where the authors describe themselves as 'socialist-feminist lesbians', and Ruth Bashall speaking at 'The UK Women's Liberation Movement Campaigns and Demands, Women's Liberation History Workshop' (6/06/09), The Women's Library, London, 58. Transcript available at The Women's Library, Glasgow, uncatalogued.

predicated on a dislike of men and my lesbian identity is not to be equated with an anti-male stance'.⁷³ In a recent interview, Campbell claimed political lesbianism was 'deeply sectarian' as it was a 'strategy to cleave women from men, rather than as a way of affirming desire for women' and had nothing to do with sexual pleasure.⁷⁴ Some were also uncomfortable with the implication that sexuality could be changed so rapidly. For example, in a recent oral history interview Michelle Sedwick said:

I've just got this memory of the first political lesbian I met saying, oh you know, I've just been to the Revolutionary Radical Feminist conference, it was wonderful and I've become a political lesbian. And I mean I just, I thought hang on, you know, where's the sort of growing of one's awareness? I mean it doesn't happen overnight. I mean sexuality is not something that one just switches on and off and I just, I think that was really important for me to realise because I was a lesbian before then.⁷⁵

Some felt the focus on the political implications of lesbianism, meant discussion on lesbian sexual desire was being overlooked. Writing in 1996 Healey stated that women:

tried to convince ourselves that lesbianism was something so deeply political that you could subsume the personal within it. But whether we like it or not, what makes us different from our heterosexual sisters can never be our politics alone; what we do in bed, our lesbian sex, is just as important a part of what makes us what we are.⁷⁶

⁷³Clark, 'The Dyke', 33. See also Campbell, 'Sexual Politics', 1 and Anna Davin speaking at 'The UK Women's Liberation Movement Activism and Ideas: Experiences and Memories, Women's Liberation Movement History Workshop' (8/11/08), The Women's Library, London, 28, where she discussed the discomfort felt by lesbian feminists in her cr group over the framing of lesbianism as a political identity. Transcript available at The Women's Library, Glasgow, uncatalogued.

⁷⁴Campbell Interview, 55.

⁷⁵Michelle Sedwick speaking at The UK Women's Liberation Movement Activism and Ideas: Experiences and Memories, Women's Liberation Movement History Workshop (8/11/08), The Women's Library, London, 190. Transcript available at The Women's Library, Glasgow, uncatalogued. See also Sandra McNeill Oral History Interview, same workshop, 23-24.

⁷⁶Healey, *Sex Wars*, 8.

Consequently, as occurred with heterosexual sex, some argued that lesbian sexual practices were being ignored. For example, writing in 2005, Susan Ardill and Sue O'Sullivan noted that in the London WLM in the 1980s there 'was often a chasm between discussions about "the politics of sexuality" and discussions about what our actual different sexual practices are', and that feminist conferences or workshops 'bill themselves as being about sexuality only to turn into talk shops about the things which determine sexuality'.⁷⁷ Lesbianism as a concept, some argued, became desexualised, and seen as a political tool. Unlike in France, the impact of this in Britain, particularly from the mid-1980s onwards, was a discomfort amongst lesbian feminists over sexual roles and practices.

In 1981 the American feminist publication *Heresies* published the 'Sex' issue of their magazine, which discussed, amongst other issues, S/M practices, feminist erotica, butch/femme relationships, and prostitution. Ardill and O'Sullivan described the publication of *Heresies* as 'exciting', and that it 'signaled a move to put the erotic back into sex. Whereas the British revolutionary feminists appeared to see sex as a pleasant possibility between women who had withdrawn from men, *Sex Heresies* underlined the deep and confusing currents of desire between women'.⁷⁸ Healey pinpointed this as the start of what she terms the 'lesbian sex wars' between women 'who wanted to define their own sexuality and lesbian feminists who saw these practices as dangerous and oppressive'.⁷⁹

Unlike in France, many of the arguments focused on sadomasochistic (S/M) sexual practices.⁸⁰ These were stronger in the late-1980s, which is outside the timeframe of this thesis, but the arguments grew steadily from the early-1980s onwards. For example, Barbara Jones remembered discussions over S/M within lesbian culture, questioning whether it was oppressive or

⁷⁷Ardill and O'Sullivan, 'Upsetting an Applecart', 98.

⁷⁸Ibid., 107.

⁷⁹Healey, *Sex Wars*, 96.

⁸⁰For a more detailed discussion on sadomasochism and lesbian feminism see Shane Phelan, *Identity Politics: Lesbian Feminism and the Limits of Community* (Temple University Press, 1991), 99-135.

liberating for women.⁸¹ In 1983, the *London Women's Liberation Newsletter* refused to carry a notice about a meeting to discuss lesbian sadomasochism.⁸² Critics of S/M practices argued it was not merely a sexual fantasy, but recreated male violence within lesbian relationships. For anti-S/M feminists it was 'impossible to divorce the concepts of domination and submission from the sexual relationships between men and women', and lesbian S/M 'takes the heterosexual model and mimics and exaggerates all its horrors and inequalities. It comes from the system and it feeds back into it'.⁸³ In France, as will be explored, feminist debate centred more on identity than sexual acts, arguably due to the influence of theorists like Wittig and Fouque. Weeks notes how some feminists accepted a form of 'moral absolutism' around issues like S/M and lesbianism, which 'attempted to prescribe appropriate behavior as the test of legitimate incorporation into the army of the good'.⁸⁴ Within these discussions on lesbianism in the WLM, as was the case with prostitution and pornography, female sexual agency was often lost. Arguably they implied that the sexual choice of an individual woman was not hers alone, and that it should be considered within the broader political and social context of gender relations. In this respect the politicisation of sexuality could prove limiting for women, by forcing them to choose between ideological purity and personal choice.

France

⁸¹Jones Interview, 76. See also Jeffreys, *Heresy*, 124; Ardill and O'Sullivan 'Upsetting an Applecart', 110-122 where they described the arguments that occurred within the London Lesbian and Gay Centre in 1985 over whether S/M Groups should be allowed to meet there.

⁸²Ardill and O'Sullivan, 'Upsetting an Applecart', 111. See also Marie France, 'Sadomasochism and Feminism', *Feminist Review* 16 (1984): 305-308; Linda Bellos, 'For Lesbian sex, against Sado-Masochism', in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, eds. Hannah Kanter et al. (Women's Press, 1984).

⁸³Jayne Egerton, 'Prudes and Puritans: Sexual Pleasure Politics and the Attack on WAVAW', in *Women Against Violence Against Women*, eds. Dusty Rhodes and Sandra McNeill (Onlywomen Press, 1985), 212. See also Jeffreys, *Heresy*, 183-185.

⁸⁴Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents: Meanings, Myths and Modern Sexualities* (Routledge, 2002), 45.

Lesbianism and the Front Homosexuelle d'Action Révolutionnaire (FHAR)

As in Britain, the gay liberation movement in France grew following the events in Stonewall, although the events of 1968 were also influential. As Bourq notes, 'a veritable philosophy of desire emerged in the early 1970s' amongst *soixante-huitard* circles.⁸⁵ As such, it was not surprising a strong gay rights movement emerged from it.

Unlike in Britain, there were stronger and longer lasting connections between male gay liberation and lesbian activists in France, specifically within the group *Front Homosexuelle d'Action Révolutionnaire* (FHAR) formed in 1971.⁸⁶ A Paris-based movement of lesbian feminists and gay activists, FHAR aimed to combat the heterosexism within French society. Key members who were active in the group included Christine Delphy, Monique Wittig, Françoise D'Eaubonne, and Guy Hocquenghem. Unlike in Britain, as Frédéric Martel notes, the group was originally started by a group of women including D'Eaubonne, who were joined by homosexual men from the organisation *Arcadie*.⁸⁷ Martel writes that 'men were still absent when the women first took up arms, marking the birth of French homosexual radicalism. Initially, the

⁸⁵ Julian Bourq, 'The Moral History of 1968', in *May 68: Rethinking France's Last Revolution*, eds. Julian Jackson, Anna-Louise Milne and James S. Williams, (Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 23.

⁸⁶ Homosexual Front for Revolutionary Action. For more detailed information on the actions of FHAR see 'FHAR', in *Dictionnaire des cultures gay et lesbiennes*, ed. Didier Eribion (Larousse, 2003), 194-196; Françoise Picq, *Libération des femmes: quarante ans de mouvement* (Éditions Dialogues, 2011), 111-127; Frédéric Martel, *The Pink and The Black: Homosexuals in France since 1968*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Stanford University Press, 1999), 13-32; Julian Jackson, *Living in Arcadia: Homosexuality, Politics and Morality in France from the Liberation to AIDS* (Chicago University Press, 2013); Michael Sibalís, 'Gay Liberation comes to France: *The Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire* (FHAR)', *French History and Civilization: Papers from the George Rudé Seminar* 1 (2005): <http://www.h-france.net/rude/2005conference/Sibalís2.pdf> Accessed December 13, 2015.

⁸⁷ For more information on *Arcadie* see Jackson, *Arcadia*. The group was more 'homophile' in its approach, believing that being discreet and respectable would be more effective than the radical actions advocated by FHAR.

revolution was women's work'.⁸⁸ This strong female component perhaps explains why there was more crossover between gay liberation and lesbian activists over a longer period than in the GLF.

FHAR wanted to challenge the dominant view of sexuality, and encouraged fellow homosexuals to come out and live openly. As an example of the group's sentiments, D'Eaubonne stated: 'You say society ought to integrate homosexuals. I say homosexuals ought to disintegrate society'.⁸⁹ FHAR was modeled on the MLF, with an unstructured, loose formation, and the group communicated mainly through the magazine *Tout!*⁹⁰ The controversial twelfth issue of the magazine, previously mentioned in Chapter Two, was written and edited by members of FHAR.⁹¹ In the issue, one can see the framing of the eradication of sexual shame as necessary for the birth of left-wing political consciousness, which was prevalent in the French left, unlike in Britain. For example, FHAR framed sexual freedom as necessary to create a true revolution, and rid men and women of sexual shame. For example, they wrote: 'Ceux qui ont vraiment l'intention de jouir sans entraves ont plus de deux mille ans d'interdits à transgresser' (Those people who really want to experience pleasure without any constraints have more than two thousand years of prohibitions to overcome).⁹²

The group also politicised sexuality by connecting it to broader left-wing activism. For example, they had a strong relationship with the Maoist and libertarian group *Vive la Révolution!* (VLR) and took part in events such as the 1971 May Day Protests (see Figure 3.1).⁹³

⁸⁸Martel, *The Pink and the Black*, 19. See also Sébastien Chauvin, 'Les aventures d'une "alliance objective". Quelques moments de la relation entre mouvements homosexuels et mouvements féministes au XXe siècle', *L'homme et la société* 158 (2005): 115.

⁸⁹Martel, *The Pink and The Black*, 19.

⁹⁰*Tout!* was the publication of the Maoist and libertarian group *Vive la Révolution* (VLR), of which Hocquenghem was a member, and was edited by Jean-Paul Sartre.

⁹¹In this issue the magazine published articles and letters from FHAR asserting the right to sexual freedom. The magazine was eventually seized by police and Sartre prosecuted, although the investigation was later stopped following protests by FHAR.

⁹²*Tout! Ce que nous voulons; tout*, No.12, Avril, 1971.

⁹³Martel, *The Pink and The Black*, 37; Stéphanie Arc, *Les Lesbiennes* (Le Cavalier Bleu, 2010), 44.



Figure 3.1: FHAR group at May 1 Protest, Paris 1971.

As Picq noted in 1993, for FHAR and by extension many lesbian feminists, the fight against traditional views of sexuality and bourgeois culture was inseparable from the socio-economic fight.⁹⁴ FHAR's arguments were not accepted by the whole of the left; for example, many Trotskyist and Marxist-Leninist groups felt that the revolution should only be centred on the class struggle, not sexuality or sexual freedoms.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, whereas British socialist feminists occasionally found applying politics to some aspects of sexuality problematic, in France sexuality and sexual behaviour continued to be

⁹⁴Picq, *Libération*, 120. See also Cathy Bernheim, *Perturbation, ma soeur: Naissance d'un mouvement des femmes* (Le Felin, 2010 edition), 197.

⁹⁵See 'Le pavé de l'homosexualité dans la mare gauchiste', in Picq, *Libération*, 132; Martel *The Pink and The Black*, 37.

seen as integral parts of any left-wing struggle from 1968 to the end of the MLF.⁹⁶ In addition although some British radical lesbians or lesbian separatists likewise saw sexuality as a vehicle to reject dominant cultural and societal norms, there was not a strong focus on lesbianism as a form of class warfare, or as a struggle against bourgeois oppression.

Unlike the GLF, although a mixed group, FHAR did attempt to be active in feminist campaigns, which implies that at least initially they saw themselves as part of the same movement as the MLF. For example, they interrupted an anti-abortion meeting in 1971, and joined the MLF in protests against Mother's Day.⁹⁷ Despite such events, the composition of FHAR rapidly became more male and, as occurred with the GLF, splintered as arguments increased between the men and women in the group. There were similar reasons for the division in both countries, namely that women felt they were being marginalised, and that gay men were not immune from the misogyny and chauvinism of their heterosexual counterparts. For example, a woman involved in FHAR noted that 'gay men took themselves as "the elite of the male sex" and lived in a world of misogynist selection [...] the very opposite of the liberation of women'.⁹⁸ Just as how in Britain some lesbian feminists highlighted the differences between gender and sexual oppression, and how this led to contrasting experiences, some women in France likewise began to believe that the experiences of gay men and women were too dissimilar to warrant a unified movement.

⁹⁶For a discussion on the tensions between differing sexual identities in the events of 1968, and their impact on the 1970s, see Massimo Prearo, 'Le moment 70 de la sexualité: de la dissidence identitaire en milieu militant', *Genre, sexualité & société* 3 (2010): <https://gss.revues.org/1438> Accessed December 13, 2015.

⁹⁷See Yves Roussel, 'Le Mouvement homosexuel français face aux stratégies identitaires', *Les Temps Modernes* 582 (1995): 85-108; Chauvin, 'Les aventures', 116-117. Issue 12 of *Tout!* also contained articles on abortion and contraception and another called 'Les pédés et la révolution' which discussed the 'solidarité objective' (objective solidarity) between FHAR and the MLF. FHAR, *Rapport contre la normalité* (Champ Libre, 1971), 9; Jacques Girard, *Le mouvement homosexuel en France* (Syros, 1980), 43. See also Françoise d'Eaubonne, *Histoire et actualité du féminisme* (Éditions Alain Moreau, 1972), 318, 332 where she discusses the alliance between FHAR and lesbians from the MLF.

⁹⁸Bourg, *From Revolution*, 184; Chauvin, 'Les aventures', 116-117.

Various writers of the time had their own stances on this issue. For example, d'Eaubonne wrote:

les femmes sont opprimées en tant que femmes avant de l'être
en tant que homosexuelles; les hommes ne sont réprimés
qu'en tant qu'homosexuels, jamais en tant qu'hommes.

(women are oppressed as women before being [oppressed] as
homosexuals; men are only repressed as homosexuals, never
as men).⁹⁹

Some gay men in the movement echoed this distinction. For example, in his book *Le désir homosexuel* (1972), Hocquenghem focused more on male homosexuality than lesbianism, arguing lesbianism posed a challenge to female sexuality, while male homosexuality presented a greater challenge to societal relationships.¹⁰⁰ For Hocquenghem homosexuality was implicitly masculine and FHAR was about sex while lesbian feminists were obsessed with love.¹⁰¹ As Bourg notes, 'in his [Hocquenghem's] judgment, feminism was a humanism and only a step away from the normalising traps of identity, reform and integration'.¹⁰² Consequently, many of the female members of FHAR left the group, and were absorbed into the MLF, although, as will be seen, this was not always a harmonious relationship.

Lesbianism within the MLF: Les Gouines Rouges

Lesbian feminists were involved with the MLF from the very start. As Christine Bard notes, at the 1970 protest at the Arc de Triomphe 'les hétérosexuelles ne

⁹⁹Cited in Girard, *Le mouvement homosexuel*, 102.

¹⁰⁰See Guy Hocquenghem, *Le désir homosexuel* (Librairie Artheme Fayard, 2000).

¹⁰¹Bourg, *From Revolution*, 191; Picq, *Libération*, 132.

¹⁰²Bourg, *From Revolution*, 191. See also Jeffrey Weeks, *Making Sexual History* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 86-106.

sont pas majoritaires' (Heterosexuals are not in the majority).¹⁰³ Nevertheless, lesbianism was not a priority issue in the early years of the movement, with more focus on abortion and rape. Unlike in the WLM, in the early days of the MLF there was often a reluctance for women to 'come out' as lesbians. For example, in a recent oral history interview, Delphy noted that the 'non-mixité' (non-mixed) nature of the movement provided an 'ambiance homoérotique' (homoerotic atmosphere) but despite this no one openly admitted to being a lesbian; 'nous étions toutes les femmes' (we were all women).¹⁰⁴

Groups such as *Choisir* and *Les Pétroleuses* tended not to focus on lesbianism: the former due to its stronger emphasis on legal issues, the latter its focus on class issues. Like in Britain, *Psych et Po* stressed the importance of female only spaces and female homosexuality. Fouque herself described the MLF as a homosexual movement, in that it was a movement based on the sharing of female emotion, not because of specific sexual practices.¹⁰⁵ Yet, unlike in Britain, as Duchen notes, *Psych et Po* focused on psychoanalysis, not political lesbianism.¹⁰⁶ For example, Fouque argued that 'the only discourse on sexuality that exists is the psychoanalytic discourse [...] Women's primary, fundamental homosexuality should only be a passage towards a rediscovered and truly free heterosexuality'.¹⁰⁷ As Martel notes, for Fouque and *Psych et Po*,

¹⁰³Christine Bard, 'Le lesbianisme comme construction politique' in *Le siècle des féminismes*, eds. Éliane Gubin et al. (Les Éditions de l'Atelier, 2004), 114. For an overview of the relationship between lesbians and feminists, see Natacha Chetcuti and Claire Michard, *Lesbianisme et féminisme* (L'Harmattan, 2003). For a more detailed analysis of lesbianism within the MLF see Françoise Flamant, *À tiré d'elles. Itinéraires de féministes radicales des années 1970* (Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2009).

¹⁰⁴Interview with Christine Delphy, cited in Bard, 'Le lesbianisme', 114. See also Chauvin, 'Les aventures', 111-130.

¹⁰⁵See Interview with Antoinette Fouque, in 'Notre terre de naissance', *des femmes en mouvement: Midi Pyrénées*, May 1982. See also the special issue, 'Homosexuelles, des femmes', *des femmes en mouvement*, August 22, 1980.

¹⁰⁶Claire Duchen, *Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterand* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 24. See also Bard, 'Le lesbianisme', 115-116, where she discusses the impact of psychoanalysis on some feminists' sexuality.

¹⁰⁷Antoinette Fouque, 'Le MLF, c'est toi, c'est moi', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, September 1973, in *New French Feminism: An Anthology*, eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Schoken Books, 1988), 118.

masculinity was the enemy, not men, and the former could exist within lesbian relationships in addition to heterosexual ones.¹⁰⁸ This affected the way that women in this group self-identified. For example, *Psych et Po* were often unwilling to use the term 'lesbian' seeing it as negative and indicating 'deviation from a norm instead of a free sexual practice or a practice of solidarity with women'.¹⁰⁹ As will be seen later in this chapter, debates over whether women should identify as homosexual or lesbian was more frequent in the various currents of the MLF than in Britain.

In theory, the MLF presented itself as unified in the struggle for sexual freedom, whether gay or straight. For example, a song frequently sung at protests contained the lyrics:

Nous sommes toutes des avortées
 Nous sommes toutes des avorteuses
 Nous sommes toutes des péripatéticiennes
 Des lesbiennes et des mal-baisées
 Nous libérons la société
 Nous libérons la sexualité.

(We have all had abortions
 We are all abortionists
 We are all streetwalkers
 Lesbians and the sexually frustrated¹¹⁰
 We are liberating society
 We are liberating sexuality).¹¹¹

However, as there was in the WLM, in practice there was often more discomfort over how the MLF should approach lesbianism. The most significant French lesbian presence in the first few years of the MLF was the group *Les Gouines Rouges* (Red Dykes). Founded in 1971 by lesbian feminists, including Monique Wittig, Cathy Bernheim and Marie-Jo Bonnet, and named from a slur thrown at

¹⁰⁸ Martel, *The Pink and The Black*, 40.

¹⁰⁹ Duchen, *Feminism*, 24. See also Picq, *Libération*, 164.

¹¹⁰ The literal meaning of 'mal-baisé(e)' is badly/poorly fucked.

¹¹¹ Bernheim, *Perturbation*, 61; Picq, *Libération*, 130; Bard, 'Le lesbianisme', 114. For more information on the songs sung by the MLF see Tierce, *Mouvement de libération des femmes en chansons: histoire subjective 1970–1980* (Tierce, 1981).

Wittig by a passerby, the group were most active from 1971-1973/4.¹¹² Just as for many lesbian feminists in the WLM, *Les Gouines Rouges* often complained about feeling unaccepted by the wider MLF, particularly the class-struggle current.¹¹³ For example, in a 1971 tract they argued that they felt part of the MLF, but the MLF saw them as outsiders. They wrote:

Quand au mouvement, on parle d'elles, on dit "nous" les femmes. Quand on parle des homosexuelles, on dit "elles". Nous, les lesbiennes, qui disons "nous" avec les avortées, les travailleuses, les mères de famille etc., nous ne sommes pas les autres.

(Within the movement, when people talk about other women they say 'we' women. When people [feminists] talk about homosexuals they say 'them'. We lesbians who say 'we' alongside women who have had abortions, female workers, mothers etc. we are not outsiders).¹¹⁴

Some also felt the supposed solidarity of the movement only went in one direction. For example, in a recent interview, Marie-Jo Bonnet stated:

Jamais une hétérosexuelle ne venait défendre les lesbiennes quand il arrivait quelque chose, au nom de la sororité [...] Nous, on avait signé le "Manifeste des 343 Salopes", donc on avait une solidarité évidente avec les hétérosexuelles, mais l'inverse n'était pas vrai.

(Heterosexual women never came to the defence of lesbians, in the name of sisterhood, when something happened [...] we [lesbian feminists] had signed the "Manifesto of the 343 Bitches/Sluts" so we were obviously in solidarity with heterosexuals but the reverse was not true).¹¹⁵

¹¹²Martel, *The Pink and The Black*, 44.

¹¹³Femmes d'Orsay, 'Texte de Lesbiennes 1977', cited in Liliane Kandel and Claudie Lesselier, 'Féminisme' in *Dictionnaire de l'homophobie*, ed. Louis-George Tin (Presses universitaires de France, 2003), 174. See also Catherine Gonnard, 'Mouvements lesbiens' and 'Convivialité lesbiennes', in *Dictionnaire des cultures gay et lesbiennes*, ed. Didier Eribon (Larousse, 2003), 130, 330-332.

¹¹⁴Bernheim, *Perturbation*, 198. See also Marie-Jo Bonnet cited in Chauvin, 'Les aventures', 116.

¹¹⁵Chauvin, 'Les aventures', 118. See also quotes by Christine Delphy in Martel, *The Pink and The Black*, 45-46.

Les Gouines Rouges allowed some women to examine their own sexuality and similarly to many in the WLM, recreate their sexual identity. For example, at a meeting held by the MLF against violence towards women in May 1972, a few members from *Les Gouines Rouges* stood up and read out a tract, and after they had finished speaking, women in the audience began to speak out as lesbians.¹¹⁶ Apart from the later S/M debate, comparing homosexual and heterosexual sex, and that arguing both were oppressed by male power was not as widespread within the WLM, perhaps as a result of the reluctance some felt about discussing sexual pleasure in more detail. In contrast, *Les Gouines Rouges*, connected the repression of lesbianism within society to the repression of female heterosexual sexuality. In a 1971 tract, they wrote:

La répression de l'homosexualité est de même nature que la répression que subissent toutes les femmes dans leurs rapports sexuels avec les hommes: les deux visent à maintenir les rôles sexuels, c'est à dire la domination masculine.

(The repression of homosexuality is the same as the repression that women undergo in their sexual relationships with men: they both aim to maintain the dominant sexual roles, which is to say masculine domination).¹¹⁷

Les Gouines Rouges eventually started meeting more infrequently, and its members increasingly became part of the MLF. Some historians have presented this absorption as evidence of the lack of a 'separate' autonomous lesbian movement in France, unlike in other countries, seeing *Les Gouines Rouges* as an individual group with little broader influence. For example, Martel notes most lesbians left FHAR and joined the MLF, without creating a new lesbian movement.¹¹⁸ In addition Picq wrote that:

Dans la plupart des pays, un mouvement lesbien s'est développé, parallèlement au mouvement féministe. Mais, en France, homosexuelles et hétérosexuelles luttèrent ensemble, parce que [...] toutes veulent abolir le patriarcat.

¹¹⁶Martel, *The Pink and The Black*, 45.

¹¹⁷Bernehim, *Perturbation*, 198-199.

¹¹⁸Martel, *The Pink and The Black*, 45. See also Picq, *Libération*, 235-237; Bard, 'Le lesbianisme', 117.

(in most countries a lesbian movement developed parallel to the feminist movement. But, in France, homosexuals and heterosexuals fought together because they all wanted to abolish the patriarchy).¹¹⁹

Picq argued that, as a result, there were more problems around lesbianism in the MLF. It was certainly true that in Britain there was arguably a more explicit current of lesbian separatism within revolutionary feminism, which contributed to the feeling by some in the WLM that there was a separate 'lesbian movement' with different aims than heterosexual feminists. Moreover, the closer relationships between FHAR and lesbian feminists, and the fact *Les Gouines Rouges* were absorbed into the broader MLF, affected the relationships between lesbians, gay liberation activists and heterosexual feminists. Nevertheless, in both countries lesbian activism frequently remained connected to second-wave feminism. Whereas the WLM arguably had two 'movements' with different life expectations that should have separated much earlier, which splintered the movement, within the MLF, there were various pockets of lesbian activism that could not fully join together.

Lesbianism and Political Identity

As Martel notes:

the MLF was characterised, if not by the expression of a freely chosen homosexuality, then at least by a fundamentally monogamous women's culture in search of emotional intimacy and sharing [...] Some, of course, were openly "homosexual". For others lesbianism was an attitude chosen situationally.¹²⁰

Being part of an autonomous female movement led some women to redefine their sexual identity, and use sexuality as a base for collective political action. However, this led to different sorts of debates than in the WLM.

¹¹⁹Picq, *Libération*, 235.

¹²⁰Martel, *The Pink and The Black*, 39.

In both movements, sexuality was seen as connected to feminist identity, and some thought that the only 'true feminists' were lesbians.¹²¹ Like the authors of the Leeds paper, the definition of lesbianism for French feminists could be fluid. For example, in 1974 Wittig wrote: 'being in a movement that excluded men was a homosexual act, at least ideologically. Lesbianism is not only a sexual practice, it is also cultural behaviour'.¹²² Bard also notes that, within the context of the MLF, some felt that to choose to become a lesbian was to help in the construction of 'une identité collective' (a collective identity).¹²³

As a result, individual women often felt confused over what maintaining sexual and emotional relationships with men revealed about their feminism. For example, in her memo, Zelensky-Tristan, wrote that:

En théorie, la position était tenable. Pas dans la pratique. Je le répète, une pression s'exerçait dans le mouvement. On se sentait, nous les hétéros, un peu crasseuses. Comment pouvais-je, moi féministe radicale, continuer à avoir des rapports avec mon "ennemi" objectif?

(In theory the position was tenable. Not in practice. I say it again, there was pressure within the movement. We felt, we heterosexuals, a bit filthy. How could I, a radical feminist, continue to have relationships with my objective "enemy"?)¹²⁴

In a recent oral history interview, Picq described how she felt a malaise amongst some women around the issue and:

¹²¹See for example, Vicky, 'Harmonie ou si l'homosexualité m'était contée!', *Les Temps Modernes*, April–May 1974 in *Les femmes s'entêtent* (Éditions Gallimard, 1975), 398-403; Collective for a Lesbian Front, 'Extract from Radical Lesbian Tract', March 7-8 1981, in *French Connections: Voices from the Women's Movement in France*, ed. and trans. Claire Duchon (Hutchinson Education, 1987), 91-93.

¹²²Monique Wittig, *Actuel*, January 1974, cited in Martel, *The Pink and The Black*, 38.

¹²³Bard, 'Le lesbianisme', 115. See also Arc, *Les lesbiennes*, 63 and Claudie Lesselier, 'Les regroupements des lesbiennes dans le mouvement féministe parisien: position et problèmes, 1970-1982', in Groupe d'études féministes de l'Université de Paris VII, *Crise de la société, féminisme et changement* (Tierce, 1991), 89.

¹²⁴Anne Zelensky-Tristan, *Histoire de Vivre: Mémoires d'une féministe* (Calmann-Lévy, 2005), 63. See also Anne, 'La difficile frontière entre l'homosexualité et hétérosexualité' in *Les femmes s'entêtent*, 404-407; Claudie Lesselier, 'Féminisme, lesbianisme, hétérosexualité', *Politique, la revue* 5 (1997): 35.

il y a avait beaucoup de femmes qui se sentaient, on ne peut pas parler de nos problèmes de couple [...] parce que on sera très tout de suite accusé d'être des traîtres

(there were a lot of [heterosexual] women who felt that they couldn't talk about their relationship problems [...] because we would straight away be accused of being traitors [to the movement]).¹²⁵

Some also argued that the redefinition of lesbianism as a political act was an idealisation of homosexuality. For example, writing in 1977, Anne Tristan (unrelated to Anne Zelensky-Tristan) claimed that there was a hierarchy of sexualities within the movement, 'avec, en haut, l'homosexualité pratiquante' (with practicing homosexuality at the top).¹²⁶ As in Britain, women felt guilty that their political and sexual identities were deemed incompatible. It meant that lesbian feminists felt that women's liberation did not represent them, which arguably diluted the movement's aim of a unified sisterhood, and demonstrated that a shared gender was insufficient if women had contrasting life experiences.

The Debate over Political Lesbianism within *Question Féministes*

Whereas in the WLM political lesbianism was discussed by various currents, as Duchén notes, the majority of the disagreements in the MLF occurred within radical lesbian feminist groups, although broader discussions around lesbianism did occasionally surface elsewhere.¹²⁷ The major split around whether lesbianism was essentially a political choice came in 1980–81 within the collective and journal *Questions Féministes* (QF), which had been founded in 1977.

¹²⁵ Françoise Picq interviewed by Robert Gildea, 27/04/07. Part of the oral histories collected by Robert Gildea, James Mark and Annette Warring, eds., *Europe's 1968: Voices of Revolt* (Oxford University Press, 2013). Transcript available at <http://around1968.modhist.ox.ac.uk> See also Annette Levy-Willard interviewed by Robert Gildea 6/06/07, in the same collection, where she discusses the loneliness some heterosexual women felt within the movement.

¹²⁶ Anne Tristan and Annie de Pisan, *Histoires du MLF* (Calmann-Lévy, 1977), 21.

¹²⁷ Duchén, *French Connections*, 78.

In 1980, the journal published two articles dealing with the question of lesbianism as a political choice: 'La pensée straight' by Monique Wittig and 'Hétérosexualité et féminisme' by Emmanuèle de Lesseps. Wittig's article – which was also influential in the British and American movements – attacked heterosexuality as a normative and oppressive structure underlying all institutions and thinking, and a political regime that must be overthrown. Wittig also argued that the concepts of 'man' and 'woman' cannot exist without each other, and as lesbians exist for and with women they are outside of such definitions. She wrote:

Qu'est ce que la femme? [...] Franchement, c'est un problème que les lesbiennes n'ont pas, simplement changement de la perspective, et il serait impropre de dire que les lesbiennes vivent, s'associent, font l'amour avec des femmes car "femme" n'a de sens que dans les système de pensée et les systèmes économiques hétérosexuels. Les lesbiennes ne sont pas des femmes.

(What is a woman? [...] Frankly, it is a problem that lesbians don't have, a simple change of perspective and it would be inappropriate to say that lesbians live with, associate with, make love to women because 'woman' only has meaning in a heterosexual system of thought and heterosexual economic systems. Lesbians are not women).¹²⁸

Wittig further discussed these ideas in later articles, including *On ne naît pas femme* (1981) in which she argued that becoming a lesbian was not only refusing to be a woman but also rejecting the economic and ideological power of men.¹²⁹

As noted previously, heterosexuality as a violent political institution and lesbianism as a form of political resistance were familiar to many within the WLM, mainly through the works of Wittig and Rich. However, unlike in Britain, the centrality of theoretical debates to some in the MLF affected the debates on political lesbianism, making it more abstract. Not all women were happy with Wittig applying a materialist analysis to heterosexuality and gender relations. As

¹²⁸Monique Wittig, 'La Pensée Straight', *Questions Féministes* 7 (1980): 53. For a response to the idea of lesbians as 'non-women' see Icaria, 'Heteroppression', *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* 1 (1981) in Duchén, *French Connections*, 94-96.

¹²⁹Monique Wittig, 'On ne naît pas femme' in id., *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Beacon Press, 1982), 13. See also id., *Le corps lesbienne* (Les Éditions de Minuit, 1973).

Sébastien Chauvin notes, other materialist feminists argued that heterosexual relationships were not an oppressive institution but:

un lieu de lutte et de confrontation de classe, et la fuite hors de ces rapports, si elle peut apparaître comme une solution individuelle ne possède rien de supérieurement révolutionnaire.

(a site of struggle and class confrontation, and escape from these relationships, though it may appear to be a solution for the individual, has nothing profoundly revolutionary [about it]).¹³⁰

Moreover, some were unhappy with Wittig's classification of lesbians as neither men nor women, believing she was supporting dominant patriarchal assumptions. For example, in a 1981 article the materialist feminist Catherine Deudon termed Wittig's argument and lesbian separatism 'the Lesbian Nation', and argued that 'la Nation lesbienne est en accord fondamental avec la Nation patriarcale sur l'idée de "la Femme" et le concept opposé de la lesbienne comme non-femme' (The Lesbian Nation is in fundamental agreement with the Patriarchal Nation over the notion of 'Woman' and the opposite definition of the lesbian as Non-Woman).¹³¹ Deudon pointed to the fact that lesbian women can be raped, underpaid, and kept silent just like heterosexual women, dismissing Wittig's definition.

Unlike in Britain, French feminist criticism of S/M occurred more in debates around pornography, because of the content of a specific film (see Chapter Four). In the discussions on lesbianism, like Fouque, Deudon was instead more concerned with what it said about personal identity. For example, Deudon discussed the difference between the terms 'lesbian' and 'homosexual', arguing there was no reason why the latter was less politically subversive than the former, and that she would continue to call herself a 'homosexual feminist'

¹³⁰ Chauvin, 'Les aventures', 119.

¹³¹ Catherine Deudon, 'Radicale-ment, nature-elle-ment', *La Revue d'en face* 9-10 (1981): 81-83. See also Colette Guillaumin, *Sexe, race et pratique du pouvoir: l'idée de nature*, (Cote-Femmes, 1992), 36-38; Marie-Jo Dhavernas, 'Hating masculinity not men', *La Revue d'en face* 9-10 (1981) and Icambia, 'Heteroppression', *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* 1 (1981) in Duchén, *French Connections*, 101-110; 94-96.

and not a lesbian.¹³² For Deudon, sexual behaviour was not a political act, and political lesbianism was just as divisive and counter-productive as the actions of *Psych et Po*, separating women into 'real' and 'unreal'.¹³³ Arguably, as seen, in the WLM disagreements on lesbianism were often about actions, such as the calls for women to leave heterosexual relationships to become lesbians, or penetrative sex. In the MLF, disagreements around actions and theoretical definitions were more common, and questions on how to define one's identity more significant, perhaps because of the contrasting place of theory in each movement.

The second article that contributed to the splits in QF was de Lesseps' in the same issue, which argued against political lesbianism. Just as some in the WLM highlighted the complications and intricacies of heterosexual desire and its relationship to political identity, de Lessep likewise described how it was difficult to discuss desire within a movement that implicitly argued that lesbianism was 'le bon choix' (the right choice).¹³⁴ She also argued against the essentialist idea that all sexual relationships between men and women are a form of oppression as 'un homme ne peut être défini dans tout son être comme oppresseur, pas plus qu'une femme ne peut être définie entièrement comme opprimée' (a man cannot be defined entirely as an oppressor, just as a woman cannot be entirely defined as being oppressed).¹³⁵ Continuing this train of thought, de Lesseps addressed the matter of 'sexual liberation', heterosexual or homosexual: 'la libération des femmes, dans la domaine sexuelle, ce n'est pas seulement la libération du désir homosexuel, c'est aussi la libération du désir hétérosexuel' (the liberation of women in sexual matters is not only the liberation of homosexual desire but is also the liberation of heterosexual desire).¹³⁶ Arguably de Lesseps' argument that heterosexual desire was subject to just as much normative control as its homosexual equivalent did not exist

¹³² Deudon, 'Radicale-ment', 81-83.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Emmanuèle de Lesseps, 'Hétérosexualité et féminisme', *Questions Féministes* 7 (1980): 56. See also Dominique Fougeyrollas-Schwebel, 'Controverses et anathèmes au sein du féminisme français des années 1970', *Cahiers du Genre* 39 (2002): 13-26.

¹³⁵ De Lesseps, 'Hétérosexualité', 59.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 67.

within the WLM to the same extent, or at least not explicitly, as seen in the reluctance by many British feminists to engage with discussions around heterosexual desire. It arguably meant the opportunity to provide a more detailed analysis and exploration of sexual desire was lost.

As a result of these two articles, a group from QF, which included Simone de Beauvoir, decided to re-launch the publication as *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* (NQF) in 1981, which angered some of the radical lesbian collective.¹³⁷ In an editorial in the first issue of the re-launched NQF in 1981, de Beauvoir et al. wrote that the QF collective had split in June 1980 over the issue of a 'lesbienne radicale' position put forward by a group known as 'les lesbiennes de Jussieu'.¹³⁸ The arguments around the issue were similar to those in the Leeds Paper. In a tract published in March 1981, those for lesbian separatism argued that lesbianism was not a sexual preference but a conscious political choice.¹³⁹ They disconnected lesbianism from sexual desire, drawing a distinction between political lesbians and 'homosexual feminists', and argued that 'saying that one is "not able to desire women" is remaining within the logic of servicing men's interests; it is reinforcing one's own oppression'.¹⁴⁰ However, they also claimed that the split of the QF collective was not due to their actions, asserting that the only woman in the QF collective who had declared herself a political lesbian had been called on by others to denounce an opinion she had never made, and was forced to resign.¹⁴¹

Just as in Britain, those against separatism were also unhappy with the radical lesbian faction calling heterosexual women 'collabos' (collaborators).¹⁴² The term was commonly used within some radical lesbian circles. For example, in a June 1980 meeting organised by the Jussieu group mentioned in the QF editorial, posters were put on the wall saying things like 'A woman who loves

¹³⁷ See Duchon, *French Connections*, 79; Bard, 'Le lesbianisme', 118-119.

¹³⁸ Editorial in *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* 1 (1981) in Duchon, *French Connections*, 81-83. Jussieu is a university campus in Paris.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. See also Letter to the Feminist Movement from the ex-Questions Féministes Collectives March 1, 1981, in Duchon, *French Connections*, 84-93.

¹⁴¹ Letter from ex-QF collective, 84-93.

¹⁴² Ibid.

her oppressor is oppressed. A "feminist" who loves her oppressor is a collaborator', and 'In the war of the sexes, hetero-feminism is class collaboration'.¹⁴³ NQF objected to this definition, and argued it amounted to an attempt to exclude heterosexual women from political feminism:

le terme "collabo" désigne des ennemis politiques, non des semblables dans l'oppression, ni des alliés. Et les "collabos" par définition ne peuvent être en même temps des résistantes, c'est-à-dire des féministes. Dire que les hétérosexuelles sont des collabos, ou ne pas s'opposer à ce qu'on le dise, c'est les exclure du féminisme.

(The term "collaborators" denotes political enemies, neither those who share one's oppression, nor allies. And "collaborators" cannot, by definition, also at the same time be resisters, that is feminists. To say that heterosexuals are collaborators or failure to object to the use of this term, amounts to excluding them [straight women] from feminism).¹⁴⁴

They described the radical lesbians as 'terrorists' and wrote that the movement had experienced enough totalitarian rule as result of the actions of *Psych et Po* to undergo anymore.¹⁴⁵ This implies that the 1979 division preyed on the minds of some in the French movement, influencing their actions and opinions. As already noted, controversy around the idea of heterosexual women as collaborators existed within British feminist debates on political lesbianism. However, the use of the term was perhaps more toxic in France. As Chauvin notes, the word 'reprend et étend une expression courante du mouvement ouvrier de l'époque, mais il joue aussi explicitement sur la référence à la période de l'Occupation nazie' (picks up on and extends a common expression within the labour movement at the time, but it also plays on the explicit reference to the Nazi occupation).¹⁴⁶ Bard echoes this, and points to the discovery in the 1970s of information around the deportation of homosexuals

¹⁴³Ibid. See also Chauvin, 'Les aventures', 119; Bard, 'Le lesbianisme', 118.

¹⁴⁴Editorial in NQF, 81-83. See also Deudon, 'Radicale-ment', 81-83.

¹⁴⁵Editorial in NQF, 81-83. See also Association du Mouvement pour les luttes féministes and Simone de Beauvoir, *Chroniques d'un imposture: du mouvement de libération des femmes à une marque commerciale*, 1981, cited in Bard, 'Le lesbianisme', 118.

¹⁴⁶Chauvin, 'Les aventures', 119.

under the Vichy government as a reason for the use of the term.¹⁴⁷ While no such cultural and historical baggage was attached to the term in Britain, arguably in both countries the controversy around the term resulted from the fact that something as personal as sexuality and sexual identity was being criticised and dismissed; a negative outcome from making the personal political. Despite these disagreements, although political lesbianism was controversial, it perhaps did not contribute to the same waning of the MLF as occurred in the WLM. The trademarking of MLF by *Psych et Po*, and not discussions on separatism, was instead viewed by some as the 'end' of the movement in 1979, but even then this was more about the media and public representation of the MLF. Discussions on separatism did not seem to have the same toxic impact as in the British context.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, within British and French second-wave feminism there were parallel ideas in discussions on lesbianism. The impact of taking part in a supportive, women-only movement led some to believe that sexuality and political separatism should be linked. In addition, in both movements lesbian and heterosexual feminists alike felt alienated from each other. However, there were contrasting approaches between the WLM and MLF. In France the stronger relationship between lesbians and male gay liberation activists in FHAR, and the existence of *Les Gouines Rouges* resulted in a more painful and muddled crossover than in Britain, which caused some French lesbian feminists to become unsure of their place in the MLF. The debates around political lesbianism also had contrasting results. The influence of theorists on the MLF, and the disagreements within the QF collective, led to a more abstract discussion, while the WLM conference structure meant arguments about the place of lesbianism had a more pernicious impact on the broader movement, not just one current. Finally, the issues of sexual shame, 'sexual liberation', and class sprung up in some of the debates within the MLF, in contrast to the WLM,

¹⁴⁷Bard, 'Le lesbianisme', 118. See also Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy* (Éditions de Seuil, 1987) who describes the pushback against the actions of the Vichy government in the 1970s.

as result of a deeper influence of theories launched by the *soixante-huitards*. Yet for both movements, political lesbianism highlighted divisions in the movement over the place of an individual's sexual identity in a political collective, and that a sense of sisterhood was perhaps unachievable, for women with contrasting life experiences and expectations.

Chapter Four: Pornography

Although the majority of second-wave feminist campaigns on sexuality centred on calls for more sexual freedoms for women, pornography, rape, and to a certain extent prostitution, instead dealt with freedom for women from oppressive elements of sexuality and male behaviour. In both movements, feminist pornography debates mainly focused on explicit films and images that had become more widespread and mainstream from the 1960s onwards. In Britain the major discussions occurred outside of the timeframe of this thesis, but a precursor to them occurred in the 1970s, and therefore comes under the remit of this study. There were some similarities between the British and French feminist approach. The oppressive impact of sexualised images on women, and their connection to male violence were discussed by both movements, while feminist criticism of pornography caused disagreements with other left-wing activists over the extent to which 'sexual liberation' was an absolute right. Unlike their approach to abortion, moreover, feminists in Britain and France were arguably also unsure of their political aim, resulting in less cohesive and effective campaigns. Yet, these debates on pornography differed in scope and aim. In Britain, pornography received considerable political and public attention from right-wing moralists and politicians, unlike in France, where discussion of pornography was smaller and less divisive. This chapter will examine all these concerns, in order to compare what British and French feminist debates on pornography revealed about their views on sexuality, violence, objectification, and public representations of women.

The Broader Legal and Social Context

Definition

As it is today, the definition of pornography or pornographic material in this period was changeable and fluid, and varied according to who did the defining.

As Segal noted in 1990, in the 1970s there were 'three distinct positions on pornography: liberal, moral and feminist'.¹ This distinction can be applied to both Britain and France, although to different degrees and with varying implications. As Segal stated, the liberal position tended to offer a 'non-evaluative definition of pornography', seeing it as sexually explicit material (words and images), which acted as an incentive to action, assumedly masturbation.² The originality of the feminist position came from the focus on how pornographic material objectified women, and how it connected to male violence. For example, by the 1980s, as Elizabeth Wilson noted in 1992, anti-pornography feminists had changed the definition to 'sexually explicit material which must depict women as enjoying or deserving some form of physical abuse', which defined women 'in terms of their relationships to men's lust and desire'.³ Speaking with regard to the American situation, in 1993, feminist sociologist Diana E. Russell defined pornography as 'material that combines sex, and/or the exposure of genitals with abuse or degradation in a manner that appears to endorse, condone or encourage such behaviour'.⁴

The moral approach also stressed the wider impact of pornography. However, this was within a religious or social conservative framework, arguing that pornographic images corrupted individuals, and disconnected sex from procreation. For example, Bishop Trevor Huddleston, a prominent anti-apartheid and moral purity campaigner, defined pornography as 'the abuse of that which is made in the image and likeness of God for any end whatsoever'.⁵ Unlike in France, this approach often influenced the wider political discussion of pornography, as will be explored later in the chapter.

¹Lynne Segal, 'Pornography and Violence: What the Experts Really Say', *Feminist Review* 36 (1990): 30. See also Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation* (Picador Press, 1987), 200.

²Segal, 'Pornography', 29.

³Elizabeth Wilson, 'Feminist fundamentalism: The shifting politics of sex and censorship', in *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate*, eds. Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh (Virago Press, 1992), 24.

⁴Diana E. Russell, ed., *Making Violence Sexy: Feminist Views on Pornography* (Open University Press, 1993), 2-3.

⁵John Capon, *And There Was Light: Story of the Nationwide Festival of Light* (Lutterworth Press, 1972), 42.

How pornography differed from erotica was also a subject of discussion. Although some radical feminists in both countries saw such a distinction as irrelevant, for others, it was significant.⁶ For example, Russell defined erotica as 'sexually suggestive or arousing material that is free of sexism, racism, and homophobia, and respectful of all human beings and animals portrayed'.⁷ Some feminists even attempted to produce 'feminist' erotica themselves. For example, the British group *Sheba*, which started as a black feminist collective, but later evolved to become a lesbian group, published a collection of lesbian erotic texts, *Serious Pleasures* (1991). In an oral history testimony, a member of this collective, Sue O'Sullivan, defined *Sheba*'s stance as 'anti-porn but pro-lesbian erotica', distinguishing between the two, by describing the erotica they published as created for the female gaze, and lacking any violence or subjugation of women.⁸

Legislation

In both countries, pornography was regulated through obscenity regulation – regarding the depravation of an individual – and indecency – which concerned the causing of public offence – although the former was more significant.⁹ In England, Wales and Northern Ireland pornography was regulated by the various Obscene Publications Acts of 1857, 1959, and 1964.¹⁰ Previously viewed as a common law misdemeanour, the 1857 Act made the publication of obscene materials a statutory offence, although the definition of what constituted 'obscene' was not specified.¹¹ The legal test for the definition of obscenity came

⁶See Segal, 'Pornography', 32, 39.

⁷Russell, *Making Violence*, 3.

⁸Sue O'Sullivan interviewed by Rachel Cohen for The Sisterhood and After Project, 6-8/01/12 (The British Library, C1420/30), 163. See also Beatrix Campbell, 'A Feminist Sexual Politics: Now You See it Now You Don't', *Feminist Review* 5 (1980): 13, where Campbell argued feminists should try to create more erotica themselves; Carole Spedding, 'Load to Sheba Feminist Publisher', *Spare Rib*, No.113, Dec 1981, 11.

⁹Editorial, 'The Litter of Pornography', *The Times*, April 23, 1971.

¹⁰Scotland was exempt from these laws because it was believed that Scottish common law was sufficiently stringent.

¹¹For more information, see M. J. D. Roberts, 'Morals, Art and the Law: The Passing of the Obscene Publications Act, 1857', *Victorian Studies* 28:4 (1985): 609-629.

in the Regina vs. Hicklin Case in 1868, over the reselling of an anti-Catholic pamphlet called 'The Confessional Unmasked: Showing the depravity of the Romish priesthood, the iniquity of the Confessional, and the questions put to females in confession'.¹² In his closing speech Lord Justice Cockburn stated: 'I think the test of obscenity is this, whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall'.¹³ This subsequently gave the Act a more restrictive interpretation as the 'Cockburn or Hicklin Test' was applied to many subsequent cases in both the UK and United States.¹⁴ The idea of morality was central to this judgment, with an emphasis on the effect on an individual, not the content. This test continued to be cited until the amendments to the Act in 1959 and 1964.¹⁵

The 1959 Act did not radically alter the previous Act, but added two new defences: first, the defence of innocent dissemination, and second, more significantly, the defence of the public good.¹⁶ The latter excluded from

¹²See Thomas C. Mackey, *Pornography on Trial: A Handbook with Cases, Laws and Documents* (ABC-CLIO, 2002), 134-137 for the full text of Lord Justice Cockburn's summing up.

¹³Sheila Jeffreys, *Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution* (Spinifex Press, 2012 edition) 62; Mackey, *Pornography*, 134-137.

¹⁴For more information, see Jonathan Green and Nicholas J. Karolides, *Encyclopedia of Censorship* (Infobase Publishing, 2009), 232.

¹⁵Obscene Publications Act 1959

Article 1 'For the purposes of this Act an article shall be deemed to be obscene if its effect or (where the article comprises two or more distinct items) the effect of any one of its items is, if taken as a whole, such as to tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely, having regard to all relevant circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it.'

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/7-8/66/section/1/enacted

Accessed December 13, 2015.

¹⁶Obscene Publications Act, 1959

Article 2 (5) 'A person shall not be convicted of an offence against this section if he proves that he had not examined the article in respect of which he is charged and had not reasonable cause to suspect that it was such that his publication of it would make him liable to be convicted of an offence against this section'.

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/7-8/66/section/2/enacted

prosecution any article that could be viewed as justified by the public good 'on the grounds that it is in the interests of science, literature, art or learning of other objects of general concern'.¹⁷ This defence was famously used in the Lady Chatterley's case of 1960, when Penguin Books were prosecuted under the 1959 Act, following their decision to publish the unexpurgated edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by D.H. Lawrence. The publishers were ultimately acquitted following the testimony of thirty-five 'expert witnesses' who testified to the novel's literary merit. This established intellectual or artistic merit as a valid defence of explicit material, which became more widespread over the following decades. As can be seen, British legislation on pornography placed more importance on the impact of any material than the content. This arguably shaped the public debate on the subject as it meant disparate groups had contrasting views on how material affected individuals, leading to confusion over whether something was pornographic or not.

This was echoed in the French legislation. The 'Loi no 49-956 du 16 juillet 1949 sur les publications destinées à la jeunesse'¹⁸ constricted the sale and publication of pornographic material to those under eighteen years of age, but excluded books from the law, due to their possible intellectual merit.¹⁹ In

Article 4 (1) 'A person shall not be convicted of an offence against section two of this Act, and an order for forfeiture shall not be made under the foregoing section, if it is proved that publication of the article in question is justified as being for the public good on the grounds that it is in the interests of science, literature, art or learning, or of other objects of general concern'.

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/7-8/66/section/4/enacted

Accessed December 13, 2015.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Law no 49-956 July 16 1949 on publications aimed at children.

¹⁹Article 1 'Sont assujetties aux prescriptions de la présente loi toutes les publications périodiques ou non qui, par leur caractère, leur présentation ou leur objet, apparaissent comme principalement destinées aux enfants et adolescents. Sont toutefois exceptées les publications scolaires soumises au contrôle du Ministre de l'Éducation Nationale'.

(Subject to the requirements of this Act will be all publications, periodical or not, which through their presentation or content appear to be mainly aimed at children and adolescents. The exception to this are school publications which are subject to the control by the Minister for Education).

addition, a law from 1929 and a decree from 1940 legislated against the circulation and publication of obscene material. The 1940 decree is significant, not only because it focused on the effect of pornographic material on minors, implying again that such material can have a detrimental and depraving effect, but also because of the exclusion of books from the law.²⁰ Historians and theorists of pornography have highlighted the supposed power of pornographic images over literary works, arguing that images attracted broader attention because they provided more realism than written works.²¹ This may explain why discussions around pornography from the 1970s onwards centred more on images than written content.

The power of the image can also be seen in the 1975 creation and implementation of 'classement X' (X-rated classification) for films under a finance law.²² Following the release of the film *Emmanuelle* (1974), there was a rise in the popularity of pornographic and erotic films, which could take advantage of the absence of legislation.²³ Such films were beginning to be shown in more mainstream cinemas than previously, when the subject had

Article 2 'Les publications visées à l'article 1er ne doivent comporter aucune illustration, aucun récit, aucune chronique, aucune rubrique, aucune insertion présentant sous un jour favorable le banditisme, le mensonge, le vol, la paresse, la lacheté, la haine, la débauche ou tous actes qualifiés crimes ou délits ou de nature à démoraliser l'enfance ou la jeunesse.

(The publications referred to in Article 1 shall not include any illustration, story, review which are favourable to banditry, lying, stealing, laziness, cowardice, hatred, debauchery or acts that can be described as crimes or offenses likely to demoralize children or young people).

www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000878175&categorieLien=d
Accessed December 13, 2015.

²⁰Loi du 23 août 1940 JO 22-03-1940p.2138-2141 and Décret du 12 mars 1929 JO 27-08-1929 p.9970 The full text cannot be found online as Acts before 1947 have not been digitised.

²¹See for example, Annette Kuhn, ed., *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality* (Routledge, 1990); Karen Boyle, *Everyday Pornography* (Routledge, 2010), 75.

²²See Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, 'Notre corps, nous-même' in *Le siècle des féminismes*, eds. Éliane Gubin et al. (Les Éditions de l'Atelier, 2004), 218.

²³See Guy Austin, *Contemporary French Cinema: An Introduction* (Manchester University Press, 1996), 47; Alison Smith, *French Cinema in the 1970s: Echoes of May* (Manchester University Press, 2005), 3.

been more clandestine.²⁴ It was one of these films, *L'Histoire d'O*, that received the most attention from the MLF, as will be seen. Following a rise in public concern, the law was passed which categorised hard-core pornographic films, or pornographic films which incited violence, within a new classification prohibiting films to minors (individuals under eighteen years of age).²⁵ In contrast, the relaxation of film censorship laws and the resulting rise in explicit films occurred more slowly in Britain. In his history of erotica in cinema, Barry Forshaw notes how directors were able to explore much more extreme forms of sexuality in European countries, including France, than in the US and Britain, where the censors held more power.²⁶ Forshaw argues this led to an enduring belief by the British and Americans that Europeans were more 'sexually liberated'.²⁷ Clearly, pornography was tied up with dominant cultural and societal ideas of sexuality, morality, and obscenity in each country, making it a difficult subject to campaign against.

Britain

Introduction

As Gillian Rogerson and Linda Semple stated in 1990: 'it has been a truism for many years that anything that happens in the United States within alternative political movements surfaces in Britain about five years later'.²⁸ In the WLM, some discussion of the topic, and campaigning, occurred in the 1970s, but it was the work of American feminists Andrea Dworkin and Catharine A. MacKinnon in the early-1980s that provided the main theoretical framework and impetus for anti-pornography feminists, and the subsequent backlash by 'sex-

²⁴Charles Hargrove, 'Has pornography become the new opium of France?', *The Times*, September 27, 1975.

²⁵Jacques Lourcelles, *Dictionnaire du cinéma: Les films* (Bouquins R Laffont Paris, 1999), 45.

²⁶Barry Forshaw, *Sex and Film: The Erotic in British, American and World Cinema* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 93. See also Austin, *Contemporary*, 46-70.

²⁷Ibid., 95.

²⁸Gillian Rogerson and Linda Semple, 'Who Watches the Watchwomen? Feminists Against Censorship', *Feminist Review* 36 (1990): 19.

positive' feminists.²⁹ Moreover, as Segal noted in 1990, it was not until the 1980s that British feminists started to seek legal restrictions on pornography, as previously 'the state and judiciary were seen as essentially patriarchal, and obscenity laws were known to have always served to suppress the work of those fighting for women's control of their fertility and sexuality'.³⁰ It was also not until the late-1980s/90s that *Campaign Against Pornography* (CAP) and *Feminists Against Censorship* (FAC) were formed, and the Labour MP Claire Short launched her 'anti-page three' campaign, calling on newspapers to ban the publication of topless models within their pages.³¹ The timeframe of this thesis, ending c.1983, limits what can be analysed to some degree, but many of the ideas later developed in the following decades were first discussed before this date. The most significant of these were over the extent to which pornography objectified women and led to male violence; and how feminists should approach pornography in the public sphere, and deal with moral conservatives.

Early Debates around Pornography and Censorship within the WLM

²⁹See Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (The Women's Press, 1981); Catharine A. MacKinnon, 'Sexuality, Pornography and Method, "Pleasure under Patriarchy"', *Ethics* 99:2 (1989), 314-346; id., 'Pornography: Not a Moral Issue', *Women's Studies International Forum* 9:1 (1986), 63-78. Dworkin and MacKinnon were most famous for bringing the pornography debates into the political sphere with their Anti-Pornography Civil Rights Ordinance in 1983. These were a series of local ordinances in Minnesota, which argued that pornography was a violation of women's rights, and women who had been harmed by pornography should be entitled to seek compensation. See Andrea Dworkin and Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality* (Organising Against Pornography, 1988).

³⁰Segal, 'Pornography', 31. See also Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 201.

³¹For more information on CAP see Barbara Norden, 'Campaign Against Pornography', *Feminist Review* 35 (1990): 1-8; Anna Marie Smith, 'What is Pornography?: An Analysis of the Policy Statement of the Campaign Against Pornography and Censorship', *Feminist Review* 43 (1993): 71-87. For more information on FAC see Gillian Rodgers and Elizabeth Wilson, eds., *Feminists Against Censorship, Pornography and Feminism: The Case Against Censorship*, (Lawrence & Wishart, 1991); Gail Chester and Julianne Dickey, eds., *Feminism and Censorship: The Current Debate* (Prism Press, 1988).

In both movements, the peripheral place of pornography in the early days of women's liberation was partly due to a reluctance to engage with what such material revealed about gender relations, and a belief that questioning pornography ran against attempts to develop a female-centred view of sexual pleasure, prevalent in the early days of the WLM. For example, in their 1992 book on the feminist debates on pornography, Segal and Mary McIntosh noted that many of the founding members of the WLM were bewildered by pornography becoming the main issue for 1980s feminists. This was largely because feminists had been ridiculed in the early days of the movement for 'seeking to liberate the suppressed power of female sexuality from male-centred discourses and practices', and they could not understand why a perceived promotion of censorship was needed in this supposedly liberated sexuality.³²

The problematic view many British and French feminists had of 'sexual liberation' was highlighted in the Introduction. This was particularly true for pornography. Writing in 2012 Jeffreys claimed that the rise of the 'permissive society' meant that 'women were to imitate male sexuality and become efficient, aggressive sexual performers'.³³ That women should attempt to copy a more assertive 'male' type of sexuality – or at the very least not refuse sex – floated around left-wing discussions at the time, and the issue of pornography seemed anomalous to this belief system. Just as lesbian feminists and male gay liberation activists from FHAR in France argued over the impact of unregulated 'sexual liberation', anti-pornography feminists in both countries similarly argued that sexuality and sexual images could not be disconnected from dominant power structures. For example, in 1977 the *Women's Report Collective* described how:

the liberal attitude that all sex is good [...] effectively removes sex from the social and political areas which are of concern to feminists. The women's movement does not separate sex from the mental or physical processes which contribute to social being, but the 1960s

³²Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh, eds., *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate* (Virago Press, 1992), 3.

³³Jeffreys, *Anticlimax*, 233.

propagation of “sexual liberation” effectively divorces sex from relationships, power, politics, conditioning and capitalism.³⁴

Re-examining the implications of sexual freedom was often a slow process. For example, writing in 1990, Jeffreys discussed how, in a London anti-pornography group formed in 1977, the idea of 1960s-style sexual freedom was one which women still held:

Reprogrammed by our experience in the 1960s to see "explicit" sex in movies and books as positive good and nakedness as desirable, we had to overcome some powerful conditioning through our consciousness-raising sessions before we could articulate our rage. Women can only seriously critique any expression of sexuality when they have thrown the junk of psychoanalytic notions of inhibitions and repression out of the window.³⁵

Yet, in Britain and France, despite their belief that complete ‘sexual freedom’ could have negative implications for women, this did not lead to the same level of political activism by feminists seen in other campaigns around sexuality. Arguably, this was a result of the abstract nature of feminist aims in comparison to other campaigns with a clear legal aim like abortion or rape. As noted, in Britain, many feminists found it difficult to reconcile their discomfort with the sexism and exploitation engendered by so-called ‘sexual liberation’ with their distrust of establishment censorship. For example, as Coote and Campbell wrote in 1982, few feminists were ‘in doubt about the kind of images they object to; it is not so much a matter of intellectual assessment, as of gut-level response. They know which images exploit their sex and they know they want an end to them. But how to go about it?’³⁶ Some worried that any attempt to ban sexually explicit material could be applied to works by lesbian feminists, and it

³⁴Women's Report Collective, 'Pornography', in *No Turning Back: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement 1975–1980*, eds. Feminist Anthology Collective (The Women's Press, 1981), 224. See also Jeffreys, *Anticlimax*, 253.

³⁵Jeffreys, *Anticlimax*, 251. See also Sandra McNeill interviewed by Anna Gurun, 17/05/12, 23. Marge Berer and London Revolutionary Feminist Pornography Group, 'Porn as a Consciousness Raiser?' *Spare Rib*, No.70, May 1978, 5.

³⁶Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 200.

could 'cut short women's own search for ways of understanding and expressing the complexities of their sexual lives, and the possibilities for increasing their sense of sexual agency and empowerment – before it has barely begun'.³⁷

Others argued that it was a problem of media representation. Writing in 1987, for example, Segal argued that feminists should look more critically at all forms of media, and be more proactive in creating their own forms of representation.³⁸

Unlike in France, this led to the later debates in the late-1980s/90s over whether feminists should call for the censoring or restriction of pornographic material, between 'sex-positive' and anti-pornography feminists.

The Moral Right and 'Sexual Revolution'

To a greater extent than in France, in Britain it was not just feminists who were discomfited by the 'sexual revolution', the liberalisation of laws, and the movement of pornographic films from the seedy backstreets of Soho to the mainstream. Moral purity and religious groups were also concerned, and this contributed to pornography being debated in mainstream politics, and feminists having to respond.

As Anna Marie Smith notes, it was in this period in Britain that the idea of the 'beleaguered silent majority was first constructed'.³⁹ In 1970 a young Australian missionary, Peter Hill, returned to Britain with his wife after four years in India, and was shocked when he saw a street poster featuring a 'shapely attractive, scantily clad girl proffering a pint of beer'.⁴⁰ He felt the morality in the country was being undermined, and had a vision of 'tens of thousands of people, many of them young, marching for Christ in London and taking a stand

³⁷Women's Report Collective, 'Pornography', 2-3. See also Rosalind Coward, 'Sexual Violence and Sexuality,' *Feminist Review* 11 (1982): 9-22; Ellen Willis, 'Feminism, Moralism and Pornography' (1979) reprinted in *Beginning to See the Light: Pieces of a Decade*, ed. Ellen Willis (New York, 1981), 34; Segal, 'Pornography', 38; Spedding, 'Load', 11.

³⁸See Lynne Segal, *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism* (Virago Press, 1987) See also Coward, 'Sexual Violence', 9-22.

³⁹Anna Marie Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality 1968-1990* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 25.

⁴⁰Amy C. Whipple, 'Speaking for Whom? The 1971 Nationwide Festival of Light and the Search for the Silent Majority', *Contemporary British History* 24:3 (2010): 323.

for righteousness'.⁴¹ As a result he formed the *Nationwide Festival of Light*, a right-wing, religious, grassroots movement, to campaign against what they perceived as the destruction and depravation of 'traditional' British Christian values. Prominent members included the journalist Malcolm Muggeridge, the singer Cliff Richard, and the clean-up TV campaigner Mary Whitehouse, who had founded the pressure group *National Viewers' and Listeners' Association* in 1965. In his history of the organisation, John Capon described what concerned the members of this 'silent majority':

hard-core pornography had come out of the backstreets and was being sold openly in suburban bookshops [...] the comparatively mild titillation in films had become aggressively raw and explicit perversion [and] the current affairs and drama departments of the broadcasting media worked on the basic premise that a straight forward marriage relationship was now no longer the "norm" and sexual explicitness was acceptable family viewing.⁴²

The movement soon grew and, in September 1971, 35,000 people gathered in Trafalgar Square to demonstrate against this perceived explosion of pornography. As Amy C. Whipple notes, although the *Festival of Light* was tapping into the widespread right-wing belief that moral liberalisation had been pushed by a liberal minority, in terms of their organisation, they borrowed from the 'left' in using demonstrations as a means to enact institutional change, and attract British youth: 'Thousands of teens and young adults demonstrating on behalf of traditional Christian morality would be proof that the Permissive Society was, in fact, a wrongful imposition on the nation'.⁴³ In contrast to British anti-pornography feminists who were less concerned with maintaining conventional relationships or familial hierarchies, moral purists focused on the impact of sexualised images on marriage rates or the traditional family. Some within the WLM demonstrated their disagreement with this approach through direct action. For example, some anarchists, communists, and activists from the WLM and GLF interrupted the Trafalgar Square demonstration in 1971. In her memoir, the writer Michèle Roberts described how she and some others from a

⁴¹Ibid., 320.

⁴²Capon, *And There Was Light*, 6.

⁴³Whipple, 'Speaking for Whom?', 320.

WLM group decided to stage an event 'satirising the hypocrisy surrounding the bourgeois family' and so dressed up as a family group and walked chained together with signs saying 'The Unholy Family' and 'Fuck the Family'.⁴⁴

Unlike in France, the rise of such groups resulted in more 'mainstream' debate on pornography by the political establishment. For example, following what the Labour peer Lord Longford described as 'mounting public concern about the great expansion of pornographic, or near pornographic material', he initiated a debate in the House of Commons on April 21 1971, and subsequently published *The Longford Report* on the issue, following investigation in 1972.⁴⁵ The report looked at films, literature, advertisements and sex education amongst other subjects, and made recommendations about what should be done about the spread of pornography. Some members from the WLM submitted evidence to the report, although 'it was emphasised that there is no agreed group policy'.⁴⁶ Their evidence drew no connections between male violence and pornography, instead describing how pornographic material sexualised and exploited women, arguing that 'advertising which used sexual overtones to sell products to either sex was almost as offensive as hard pornography'.⁴⁷ Just as in the feminist debates on prostitution in both countries, the group was careful to avoid blaming individuals, instead focusing on social and economic structures. For example, they emphasised that 'the system, rather than the symptom of pornography was at fault. Where women are deprived of opportunities for employment they become therefore willing victims of those who exploit their sexuality'.⁴⁸ This allowed the WLM to present some of their views on pornography and sexuality within a mainstream political context, just as they did, for example, with committees looking at rape (see Chapter Six); but it also perhaps exemplified how problematic an issue this was for feminists, as the group were unclear on what the solution should be.

The moral right had influenced British feminist discussions on pornography from the early days of women's liberation. For example, in a 1983

⁴⁴ Michèle Roberts, *Paper Houses: A Memoir of the 70s and Beyond* (Virago Press, 2007), 53.

⁴⁵ *Longford Report*, 23.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

paper, Sandra McNeill described the formation of the first WLM anti-pornography group in 1977, and the hostility and opposition they faced.⁴⁹ McNeill said other feminists accused them of being in league with right-wing conservatives, or saw pornography as a necessary evil that should remain ignored.⁵⁰ Just as SPUC shaped feminist arguments around abortion, the existence of moral and religious criticism of pornography likewise impacted the manner in which the WLM discussed it. Unlike in France, British anti-pornography feminists often structured their arguments in response to specific right-wing moralists. For example, as Coote and Campbell noted in 1982, anti-pornography feminists had to be careful not to be viewed by other left-wing activists as 'being pressed into service with the Mary Whitehouse brigade'.⁵¹ In an article in *Spare Rib* in 1977 the author stated that even though both herself and Mary Whitehouse found porn 'degrading' and 'anti-love and anti-sex', nevertheless there were major differences between their views.⁵² She claimed that Whitehouse focused her attacks on 'things that are not to my mind pornographic at all, but that are worthy, if not entirely successful, attempts to educate or explore', and that Whitehouse 'is fighting to keep women divided into madonnas and whores, to keep sex disgusting and hidden, to keep women from self-knowledge'.⁵³ Where anti-pornography feminists differed was in their focus on the sexism prevalent in pornographic material, rather than their sexual explicitness. The problem was with what pornography revealed about gender norms, not what impact such images could have on 'family viewing'.⁵⁴ The author also believed that advocating censorship would mean feminists were colluding with moral conservatives. For example, although she conceded that

⁴⁹Sandra McNeill, 'Pornography', April 1983, in Dusty Rhodes and Sandra McNeill, eds., *Women Against Violence Against Women* (Onlywomen Press, 1985), 18. See also Sheila Rowbotham, *The Past is Before Us: Feminism in Action Since the 1960s* (Pandora Press, 1989), 251.

⁵⁰McNeill, 'Pornography', 18.

⁵¹Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 200.

⁵²Ruth Wallsgrove, 'Pornography: Between the Devil and the True Blue Whitehouse', *Spare Rib*, No.65, Dec 1977, in *Spare Rib Reader*, ed. Marsha Rowe (Penguin Books, 1982), 453.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴See for example, Sandra McNeill, 'Pornography' and Maria Katyachild, 'Fighting Porn' (1980), reprinted in Rhodes and McNeill, *Women Against*, 15, 21.

the views of Whitehouse et al. should 'indicate to us the dangers of legislating against pornography', what is considered obscene is extremely subjective, and if attempts to ban 'degrading pictures of women' were made, other publications such as contraception information or even *Spare Rib* could also be banned.⁵⁵

The Impact of an Image: Pornography, Violence and Objectification

As Browne notes when discussing the Scottish situation, unlike in previous generations where feminists had campaigned through moralising, second-wave feminists focused more on the objectification of women, and how this contributed to their general oppression by society.⁵⁶ This shaped many of the feminist discussions on pornography. For example, in a 1978 pamphlet by an anti-pornography group and *The Rape Action Group* calling for the shop *Martin's* to stop stocking pornographic magazines, the authors described the impact of pornography on women, arguing that pornography 'encourages men to see women as bodies which exist solely for their pleasure; bodies to be leered at, groped, assaulted and raped – used and thrown away'.⁵⁷ However, it could be argued that anti-pornography feminists also engaged in moralising, just not from a religious standpoint. In defining what was 'good' and 'bad' about the representation of sexuality in society, feminists drew conclusions about what was morally acceptable; the base merely came from a belief in gender equality and not religion.

As noted, the feminist approach in Britain and France differed from the liberal analysis in its discussion of the impact of pornography on those who consumed it (men) and those who were represented in it (women). For example, in the previously cited pamphlet, the authors also questioned the impact of pornography on interpersonal relationships, asking how a man can

⁵⁵Wallsgrave, 'Pornography', 453. See also Lynne Segal, 'False Promises – Anti-Pornography Feminism', in *Socialist Register*, eds. Ralph Miliband and Leo Pantic (Merlin Press, 1993), 97; Spedding, 'Load', 11.

⁵⁶Sarah F. Browne, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland c.1968–c.1979* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Dundee, 2009), 143.

⁵⁷'How do Men See You? A Leaflet for Women about Porn' (Undated) in Rhodes and McNeill, *Women Against*, 19.

respect their mother, sister, or wife if they have looked at pornography.⁵⁸ In both countries there were often critiques of the representations of women in adverts or other media. For example, sexism in adverts was discussed frequently in *Spare Rib*, with readers invited to send in examples of sexist or demeaning adverts they had seen, as Figure 4.1 demonstrates.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Tooth & Nail

In July we celebrated the feast day of Mary Magdalen. It was this little creature who went to the tomb of Jesus, two days after his death. The tomb was, of course, empty. Like most hysterical and bumbly females, she rushed off to see Peter and tell him the tale of her discovery.

From All Saints', Margaret Street, London W1, parish paper, October 1978. Sent in by Heather Creaton, London W.4.

A woman's work is never done.



Just like a real baby, Nicki needs a lot of love and care.
You'll have to feed her when she gets thirsty.
And as soon as she's fed, you'll have to change her wet nappies.
Her hair needs brushing; and her dress needs to be kept clean and tidy.
Thank goodness she closes her eyes as soon as you lay her down to sleep!
See Nicki in your toyshop - and don't forget to say hello to all her other little friends in the "MATCHBOX" range of dolls.

Nicki
MATCHBOX

*MATCHBOX is a registered trademark of Matchless Products & Co. Ltd., Leamington Spa, CV31 3EF, UK. © 1978 Matchless Products & Co. Ltd., Leamington Spa, CV31 3EF, UK.

Dear Spare Rib, I am sending in an advertisement for 'Tooth and Nail' I found it in 'Emma' dated September 30th - Emma is a girls magazine full of rubbish.
Yours
Rebecca Jones age 12.

From Emma, 30/9/78; Mandy, 30/9/78; Bunty, 16/9/78. Sent in by Sylva Rose, Liverpool; Penelope Apinall, London W2; and Rebecca Jones, Pippa White.



Disgusting Ad of the Year

From Amateur Photographer, several weeks, Practical Photographer August 1978, SLK Camera August 1978. Sent in by Caroline Riches, Rugby; Jini Rawlings, London; and many, many more.

Dear Spare Rib, I noticed this advertisement in a comic for girls, Emma. It was the 18th of September. I thought I'd send it to you because I think Spare Rib is a great magazine.
Yours Sincerely,
Pippa White
(age 10 yrs)

WHO TO ATTACK ABOUT SEXIST ADS:
the manufacturers of the product and/or the agency who make up the ad.

WHO TO COMPLAIN TO:
The Independent Broadcasting Authority for ITV ads and programmes, 70 Brompton Road, London SW9.
The Advertising Standards Authority, although notoriously unresponsive to complaints about sexism, 15 Ridgmount Street, London WC1.

WHO TO WORK WITH:
AFFIRM (Alliance for Fair Images and Representation in Media). A group acting against sexism and offensive stereotyping, can be contacted c/o Women's Arts Alliance, 10 Cambridge Terrace Mews, London NW1.
THE NATIONAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS
Send a letter of complaint about sexist material to: The Mother or Father of the NUJ Chapel at the publication concerned, with a copy to the editor, and to the Equality Working Party, NUJ, Acorn House, 314 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1.

Spare Rib 45

Figure 4.1: 'Tooth and Nail', Spare Rib, No.78, January 1979, 45.

Many feminists in both countries argued that there was a connection between the two mediums of advertising and pornography, for example, seeing the latter

as 'merely an extension of images in adverts, as shiny decorative objects'.⁵⁹ Both were products of a society that reduced women to passive objects, defined through the 'male gaze'.⁶⁰ Just as in France, where some socialist feminists connected sexualised images of women to capitalism, some in the WLM likewise drew connections between female objectification and consumerism. For example, in the 1977 publication *Pornography* by *The Women's Report Collective*, the authors argued:

With every poster, advertisement and station bookstall displaying us as a lure to buy, money is being made. Women are seen as the vehicles for the plastic myth of mechanical, perfect, inhuman, profitable sex. That reduces us to the level of objects to be raped or humiliated, and those situations are reflected in much pornography. Pornography [...] not only aids the economy but takes people's minds off their social discomfort.⁶¹

Feminist discussions on pornography were, at their core, about the sexualised public representation of women, and the extent to which such images could impact behaviour. As Rosalind Delmar noted in a recent oral history interview, for suffragettes, representation of women meant the vote, but for their second-wave counterparts, women's representation came to mean the image: 'so it was much more about subjectivity, about, as it were, the displacement of reality onto the image. And so puncturing the spectacle, puncturing the image was very important'.⁶² This helps explain the move to direct action by some in the WLM, examined later in this section.

Jeffrey Weeks points to the tensions between pleasure and danger as significant for many in the second-wave, noting that for some it was the latter that defined women's situation: 'the danger of endemic violence against

⁵⁹Ibid., 452.

⁶⁰The term 'male gaze' describes when the audience of a film is put in the perspective of a heterosexual man. First discussed by Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', originally published in *Screen*, Autumn, 1975, 6-18.

⁶¹Women's Report Collective, 'Pornography', 226.

⁶²Rosalind Delmar interviewed by Rachel Cohen for The Sisterhood and After Project, 15-17/09/10 (The British Library, London, C1420/03), 45.

women, the violence, especially, of pornography'.⁶³ In both countries, as feminist theory about male violence increased in influence, the conversation around pornography shifted from how it objectified women to how it endangered them. It was American feminists Robin Morgan and Susan Brownmiller who first made the connection, and Morgan's phrase 'pornography is the theory, rape is the practice' became emblematic for many within the British and French movements.⁶⁴ Andrea Dworkin's *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1981) was also influential in developing a theoretical approach to male violence and how women were constrained by pornography. In it, Dworkin described pornography as the ideology behind male hatred and oppression of women, and argued that women can never be truly liberated until all pornography is banned.⁶⁵

Although, as the previously cited *Spare Rib* article demonstrates, socialist feminists were happy to discuss the negative impact of advertising, this did not extend to pornography. As Coote and Campbell noted in 1982, there was no clear socialist position on pornography, which led to confusion among some socialist feminists on how to best approach the issue.⁶⁶ Instead, unlike in France, within the WLM, it was radical/revolutionary feminists – who viewed sexuality as the primary cause of women's oppression – who predominantly emphasised the links between pornography and male violence and hatred of

⁶³ Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulations of Sexuality since 1800* (Routledge, 2014), 362.

⁶⁴ Influential texts include Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (Ballantine Books, 1993 edition, original 1976) and Robin Morgan, 'Theory and Practice: Pornography and Rape', in *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (Random House, 1978). See also Rowbotham, *The Past*, 253.

⁶⁵ See Dworkin, *Pornography*.

⁶⁶ Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 20-22.

women.⁶⁷ For example, the revolutionary feminist group WAVAW organised various conferences on the subjects of male sexual violence and child abuse from 1980-1982, including a conference called 'Porn is Violence Against Women' in September 1982.

Like in France, for British anti-pornography feminists there were concrete links between violent behaviour and sexual images. For example, writing in 1983, McNeill argued for a 'strong connection between pornography and crimes of sexual violence', adding that the 'Cambridge rapist', and the serial killer known as 'Son of Sam' had 'vast stocks of pornographic material'.⁶⁸ In a 1980 article Maria Katyachild described pornography as 'one of the most obvious ways men have of showing their hatred against women. It points out very clearly just how they see us – sexually available, open, submissive, nothing more than just playthings, objects for men's titillation and the victims of their sadistic fantasies'.⁶⁹ Other feminists disagreed and argued that focusing solely on pornography was reductive. For example, writing in 1993, Segal argued that it was not 'sexually explicit material' that harmed women, but 'the social context which deprives a woman (or sometimes a man) of her (or his) ability to reject any unwanted sexual activity'.⁷⁰

Arguably, the reason pornography received so much attention from British radical/revolutionary feminists was because it could easily be connected

⁶⁷London Revolutionary Feminist Pornography Group and Berger, 'Porn', 5. For more information on male violence and feminism see Anne Edwards, 'Male Violence in Feminist Theory: An Analysis of the Changing Conceptions of Sex/Gender Violence and Male Domination', in *Women, Violence and Social Control*, eds. Jalna Hanmer and Mary Maynard (Atlantic Highlands, 1987), 21. See also Jalna Hanmer, 'Violence and the Social Control of Women', in *Power and the State*, eds. Gary Littlejohn et al. (Croom Helm, 1978), 217-238; id., 'Male Violence and the Social Control of Women', *Catcall*, No.9, March 1979, 21-26.

⁶⁸McNeill, 'Pornography', 16.

⁶⁹Maria Katyachild, 'Fighting Porn', 19. See also Ruth Grinrod and Maria Katyachild, 'Pornography: Theory and Practice', November 1981 and Elis and Linda, 'Pornography – Strategy' (undated), in Rhodes and McNeill, *Women Against*, 261-265, 265-268.

⁷⁰Segal, 'False Promises', 100. See also Rowbotham, *The Past*, 252. For more information on scientific research on the connections between sexual violence and pornography see for example, *Technical Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography* (US Government Printing Office, 1970) and *Pornography and Sexual Violence: Evidence of the Links* (Everywoman Press, 1988).

to theories of 'male supremacy' and 'sex-class'. For example, in a recent oral history interview, McNeill discussed the importance of this connection for WAVAW, noting that:

one of the first things we did do was look at a lot of pornography [...] looking at it as the propaganda that justifies the humiliation of women [...] Pornography undermines us, and alienates us from our bodies. It is violence against women, and it encourages violence against women.⁷¹

Moreover, like prostitution and rape, socialist feminists perhaps lacked theoretical clarity around the issue, in comparison to radical/revolutionary feminists, because pornography dealt with men. For example, writing in 1989, Rowbotham noted how in the early 1970s she had refused to be drawn into the anti-pornography lobby, insisting:

that the point was to change societal relations between men and women, not to direct one's fire at symptoms of a distorted sexuality. There was the lurking assumption that a pure sexuality dwelt somewhere – presumably locked within women – which could be released onto the world.⁷²

Unlike in France, this resulted in frequent disagreements between feminists over the impact of pornographic material. For British anti-pornography feminists, graphic sexual images demonstrated both how women were constructed by male sexuality, and how these constructions could directly harm women. For them, pornography and rape were, if not directly related, then at the very least, 'linked in spirit'.⁷³ For their opponents no such link existed; pornography was, as Rowbotham argued, instead merely an image, a fantasy, not an act of violence. Rowbotham wrote that 'even though pornography expresses male-defined

⁷¹Sandra McNeill speaking at 'The UK Women's Liberation Movement Violence Against Women, Women's Liberation Movement History Workshop' (31/01/09), Hillside Leeds, 45. Transcript available at The Women's Library, Glasgow, uncatalogued. See also London Revolutionary Feminist Pornography Group and Berer 'Porn', 5.

⁷²Rowbotham, *The Past*, 251. See also Marion Bower, 'Daring to Speak its Name: The Relationship of Women to Pornography', *Feminist Review* 24 (1986): 40-55.

⁷³Wallsgrave, 'Pornography', 452.

sexual fantasy, it can be a means of conjuring women's desire because it symbolises what is forbidden in our lived reality'.⁷⁴ As occurred within the debates around rape, the essentialist nature of much of the anti-pornography discussions troubled many socialist feminists; as Segal and McIntosh noted in 1992 'men in this type of feminist analysis no longer had a sexuality. What they had was something else: a need for power, expressed through violence and disguised as sex'.⁷⁵ Such arguments would grow, and lead to the more divisive discussions of the late-1980s.

Feminists in both countries took public action to reclaim public spaces for women from the fear of rape (see Chapter Six). However, in contrast to France, the British radical/ revolutionary feminist concern about male violence and pornography also spilled over into direct action and civil disobedience. For example, in a recent oral history interview Lucy Daniels described how she and a group of others superglued the doors of a number of sex-shops in Birmingham, watching the next day as customers tried to enter.⁷⁶ Following arson attacks on sex-shops in the Chapeltown area of Leeds in 1982 by the anonymous group 'Angry Women', WAVAW wrote into *Spare Rib* denying that they were responsible, but underlining that sex-shops and 'soft porn' contributed to violence against women and 'violence against women is very much more serious than damage to property'.⁷⁷ For these women, just as the threat of rape kept them fearful in public spaces, the existence of sex-shops and blatant pornography kept them oppressed, by reminding them that women's bodies were publicly viewed as commodities, and that every woman was demeaned by the proliferation of such images. This also extended to billboards and adverts. Whether it be placing stickers on adverts saying 'This demeans women', as occurred in London, or defacing billboards containing images of

⁷⁴Rowbotham, *The Past*, 197.

⁷⁵Segal and McIntosh, *Sex Exposed*, 3-4.

⁷⁶Lucy Daniels speaking at 'The WLM Workshop', Leeds, 47. See also Browne, *Women's Liberation*, 130, which describes direct action in Dundee and Linda Bellos, 'Sex Shops a Burning Issue', *Spare Rib*, No.116, March 1982, 10 which described an attack by the group 'Angry Women' on a sex shop in Manchester.

⁷⁷*Women Against Violence Against Women*, 'If they won't close them, we will!', *Spare Rib*, No.123, October 1982, 12.

half-naked women in Dundee, the motivations were the same: to reclaim the public space and gaze from objectification.⁷⁸

In comparison to rape, which as a criminal justice issue could be fought within the judiciary, pornography was more problematic. Although often about public images, pornography could not be challenged politically without supporting censorship, which, as noted, many feminists were reluctant to condone. Moreover, it was difficult to believe in the importance of female agency and argue that all women were oppressed by pornographic images. For example, some women could find pornographic images arousing and part of their own sexual expression. This arguably explains why the campaigns in both countries focused more on explicitly violent pornography as this could be more easily connected to campaigns on male violence.

This can be seen in British feminist discussions on female pornographic actors, which occurred to a greater extent than in the MLF. Second-wave feminists universally condemned child pornography, but the issue of adult actors was more complicated. As with prostitution, feminists questioned whether there were structural reasons that explained why some women acted in porn films. In an article in *Spare Rib* in 1977, for example, the author debated whether pornographic actresses are 'sisters, forced through lack of positive alternatives as women in our society, to find employment and importance in porn', or 'traitors, colluding in the degradation of all women for a few quick quid?'⁷⁹ She quotes a pornographic actress, Georgia Stark, who talks about the detrimental effect pornography had on her psyche: ' [...] after a while I got so I could do the Eleanor Rigby thing – you know, leave your mind in a jar by the door. Then I'd know I'm just an animal and they are taking pictures of an animal'.⁸⁰ Pornographic actresses were often seen being insiders supporting

⁷⁸Browne, *Women's Liberation*, 130. See also 'The WLM Workshop', Leeds Transcript, 47-53; Jane Meagher speaking at 'The UK Women's Liberation Movement Scottish Women's Liberation Movement Workshop' (9/05/09), University of Edinburgh, 7. Transcript available at The Women's Library, Glasgow, uncatalogued.

⁷⁹Wallsgrave, 'Pornography', 452. For a discussion of these issues after the timeframe of this thesis see Maureen O'Hara, 'The Making of Pornography: An Act of Sexual Violence', *Spare Rib*, No.213, June 1990, 16-19.

⁸⁰Wallsgrave, 'Pornography', 452.

the anti-pornography movement, the most famous example being the actress Linda Lovelace, who had acted in the hard-core pornographic film *Deep Throat* (1972), but who later became active in the American anti-pornography movement. One criticism of this position can be found in a *Feminist Review* article in 1990. In it, the authors claimed that some feminists had scapegoated pornographic images in their fight against male violence and that underlying this was the assumption that 'most sexual activity in a sexist society is intrinsically male, or male identified' and that male sexuality is inherently aggressive and destructive. Consequently, they argued, 'women cannot ever freely choose to have sex with men, or use male or "male-identified" imagery in their sexual fantasies or practices. Certainly they cannot freely choose to earn their living inviting the rapacious male gaze with the use of their bodies'.⁸¹ Similar to the issue of prostitution, some British feminists had an underlying distaste for women seen to be colluding with female oppression. It demonstrated that feminist ideas on bodily and sexual autonomy in the WLM often had a limit, beyond which female agency no longer existed.

France

Introduction

Unlike in the WLM, my research has shown that in France the major feminist discussion on pornography was smaller and almost entirely focused on one specific film: *L'Histoire d'O* (1975). Originally an erotic novel written by Pauline Réage and published in 1954, it was adapted to film in 1975 by the director Just Jaeckin. It describes the submission of a young woman, 'O', to various men, and contains themes of sadomasochism, dominance, and submission. It was the film adaptation that sparked the most anti-pornography campaigning by French feminists, although the novel had been published for decades, and had a publicity ban imposed on it for many years. Moreover, as will be seen, pornography did not lead to the same acrimonious division as occurred in

⁸¹Kate Ellis, Barbara O'Dair and Abby Tallmer, 'Feminism and Pornography', *Feminist Review* 36 (1990): 16.

Britain in the late-1980s/90s. As a result, there has been much less historiographical analysis of the subject. Nonetheless, pornography in France is still an important issue to assess in a study of women's liberation.

'Sexual Revolution' and the Public Space

In France, as in Britain, there were often feminist discussions about the public objectification of women in advertisements. One of the earliest was attempts by some feminists in 1971 to start a petition against an advert by the lingerie company DIM, which featured a half-naked woman on all fours.⁸² As with British feminist arguments, the problem with the image was its use of a female body to sell a product, which, they argued, reduced all women to a sexualised body without any agency. For example, writing in 1977, Tristan described how the image in the advert represented her and all the ways she was reduced to an object fit for consumption:

Je suis la femme-chienne Dim qui s'étale sur les affiches. Je suis le pivot de la publicité. Je suis celle qui est achetée pour lui, pour eux, pour moi. Je suis la consommatrice consommée. Je suis le dindon qu'on farcit sans arrêt de slogans publicitaires [...] je m'insurge contre ce commerce qui m'avilit, me traite de simple d'esprit et me réduit à l'état d'objet.

(I am DIM's dog-woman, who is spread out on the posters. I am the centre of the advert. I am the one who is bought for him, for them, for me. I am the consumed consumer. I am the turkey that is constantly stuffed with advertising slogans [...] I rebel against this business that demeans me, that treats me as simple-minded and reduces me to the state of an object).⁸³

The idea that sexualised images of women could affect all women was a central idea of American anti-pornography feminists like Dworkin and MacKinnon, who argued that men's consumption of pornographic or sexually explicit images of women reduced women as a group to tools for men's purpose, and whose

⁸²Emilie Rodriguez, *Les mobilisations contre les publicités sexistes: Le temps de réaction?* (Le Manuscrit, 2003), 78; Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, 'Notre corps, nous-même', in *Le siècle des féminismes*, eds. Éliane Gubin et al. (Les Éditions de l'Atelier, 2004), 217.

⁸³Anne Tristan and Annie de Pisan, *Histoires du MLF* (Calmann-Lévy, 1977), 179-180. See also Zancarini-Fournel, 'Notre corps', 217.

works influenced feminists in Britain and France.⁸⁴ As with the WLM, there was confusion about the best way to protest against such adverts. For example, in 1974 Tristan and a few other feminists from *La Ligue du droit des femmes* wrote an article in *Le Monde*, calling for a law against sexist representations of women.⁸⁵ Yet, as in Britain, the petition and calls for a new law failed to gain any traction with the broader MLF. As Zancarini-Fournel notes, it was hampered by its failure to gain any well-known signatories in comparison to the 'Manifeste de 343' around abortion.⁸⁶ Writing in 1977 Tristan describes how their attempts were criticised as unachievable and irrelevant.⁸⁷ Arguably, it was also due to the difficulty of defining what should be classed as sexist or oppressive. Whereas the WLM found it difficult to decide on a clear political or legislative aim, Tristan et al. attempted to frame the issue as a legislative one, but were constrained because of a disbelief by other feminists that a law would have any impact on gender relations, or that pornography required a legislative response.

There was picketing around the release of *L'Histoire d'O*, and protests against sex-shops in the RTN marches (see Chapter Six). However, this did not form as significant a part of feminist campaigns as in the British context, and there was much less civil disobedience. Arguably, the legacy of first-wave feminism could be a factor. British feminists discussed the actions of the suffragettes to a greater extent than their French counterparts, and the role public disorder played in their campaigns. The legacy of campaigns for suffrage was dissimilar in France. Yet, this meant that unlike in Britain, French feminists lost an opportunity to convert anger at public representations of women into physical confrontation in the public sphere.

⁸⁴Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified* (Harvard University Press, 1987), 138. See also *Choisir, La Cause des femmes*, eds., *Le Programme Commun des femmes: présenté par Gisèle Halimi* (Bernard Grasset, 1978).

⁸⁵Marie Louise Fabre, 'Pour un loi anti-sexiste', *Le Monde*, June 13, 1974; Tristan and de Pisan, *Histoires*, 179; www.choisirlacausedesfemmes.org/uploads/documents/journal90_1.pdf Accessed December 13, 2015.

⁸⁶Zancarini-Fournel, 'Notre corps', 217.

⁸⁷Tristan and de Pisan, *Histoires*, 180-184.

Sexual freedom?

As Zancarini-Fournel notes, one of the most emblematic slogans of the events of 1968 was 'Jouissez sans entraves!',⁸⁸ which raised the pursuit of sexual pleasure to a political act. In France, the influence of these events meant the early days of MLF often produced explicit conversations around the topic. For example, in early issues of *Le Torchon brûle* there were articles on masturbation and how women could become more politically liberated by discovering their bodies. Although there were discussions around such topics in the WLM, female sexual self-discovery was framed more as women gaining autonomy, not political consciousness. Yet, despite this more explicit connection of sexuality and politics in post-1968 left-wing discussions, relationships between feminists and male leftists over the limits of sexual freedom were often strained.

Discussing the context of the MLF, Gisela Kaplan argues that France has a strong tradition of dissent and critical and speculative thought. Kaplan terms this 'creative traditionalism', which she argues demonstrates 'historical experience has turned protest and change themselves into a tradition'.⁸⁹ Unlike in Britain, this was often connected to sexuality. In an article in *Les Pétroleuses* for example, the author argued that, for many French leftists, political identity was connected to sexual freedom, and an individual's progressiveness and liberation could be measured by their level of sexual activity: 'Plus je baise, plus je me sens révolutionnaire' (The more I fuck, the more I feel like a

⁸⁸'Take pleasure without hindrance'. The phrase came from a book by the situationist Raoul Vaneigem, *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations* (Éditions Gallimard, 1967), and can be seen in photos of May 1968 taken by Cartier-Bresson. It is difficult to translate, 'jouissez' meaning both 'to enjoy/take pleasure in something' and 'to orgasm', but the importance is in the notion that pleasure (whether sexual or not) should be enjoyed without any constraints or shackles.

⁸⁹Gisela Kaplan, *Contemporary Western European Feminism* (Routledge, 2012), 149.

revolutionary).⁹⁰ In addition, as noted in the Introduction, the belief idea that men required a certain level of sexual activity that, if not met, would result in misery was prevalent in some French leftist circles, but women were still not viewed as sexual beings. In an article in *Les Pétroleuses* responding to interviews with various 'pornophiles' or men addicted to pornography, which originally appeared in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, this discrepancy was highlighted.⁹¹ One man described how he watched pornography because his wife and mistress didn't want to have sex, while another refused to admit women could have as much sex as men, as 'les vraies n'ont pas de sexe' (real women don't have sex).⁹² Pornography, then, was filling an existing gap in society due to the disparity between public ideas of male and female sexual desire.

Despite the subtle differences in how sexuality and political consciousness was discussed by the British and French left, it resulted in a similar impasse between male leftists and anti-pornography feminists. As Florence Rochefort notes, feminists differed from their male contemporaries in how they viewed the place of the body, with feminists more conscious of how female sexuality could be constrained by the development of 'sexual liberation', which frequently impacted the way sexuality was discussed in the movement.⁹³ For example, in a response by *Les Pétroleuses* to the previously cited *Le Nouvel Obs* article, the author described how this view of pornography represented two sides of the male construction of female sexuality: women

⁹⁰Valerie, 'Sadomasochism', *Les Pétroleuses*, 1977, 6 (Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris, 396 PET Bul). This was a slogan from Sorbonne graffiti. See also Rochefort, 'La politisation du corps' and 'L'insurrection féministe', in Artières and Zancarini-Fournel, '68, 615-622, 538-546; Vincent Porhel and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, '68, révolutions dans le genre?', *CLIO: Histoire, Femmes et Sociétés* 29 (2009): 7-15; Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, 'Genre, politique et événements dans les années 68', *Vingtième Siècle: Revue d'histoire* 75 (2002): 133-143.

⁹¹*Le Nouvel Observateur* is a weekly French news-magazine, founded in 1964. It is known for its in-depth analysis of contemporary issues.

⁹²Valerie, 'Sadomasochism', 6.

⁹³Florence Rochefort, 'La politisation des corps', in *68: Une histoire collective* (1962-1981), eds. Philippe Artières and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel (La Découverte, 2008), 615-622. See also Françoise Picq, *Libération des femmes: quarante ans du mouvement* (Éditions Dialogues, 2011), 130-132.

were either sexless, or inherently sexual and reduced to their bodies. For her, the ultimate endpoint of unchecked 'sexual liberation' would be the tightening of women's oppression, as they would feel obligated to have sex constantly and there would be 'le droit du viol' (the right to rape women).⁹⁴ As for the WLM, this symbolised a discomfort with the dominant leftist view of the role of sexuality in society.⁹⁵ For example, the author from *Les Pétroleuses* discussed how the 'permissive society' of the 1960s, and the re-valuation of sexual relations and the family structure launched by May 1968, had been detrimental to women, and created a new species: 'les stakhanovistes du baisage'.⁹⁶

As in Britain, there were those on the wider French left who claimed that feminist actions against pornography demonstrated a dangerous move towards censorship and conservatism. For example, attempts to occupy cinemas showing *L'Histoire d'O* were criticised by the newspaper *Libération* who accused feminists of enacting press censorship. As in Britain, arguably the problem was that French feminists seemed to be attempting to take moral and not political action. For their critics, this newfound 'feminist moralism' was disquieting, if not extremely dangerous. As Bourg notes: 'To moralise was to betray the revolutionary or progressive agenda of the Left – a betrayal of "the cause" by a supposed ally. Those who stereotypically moralized were priests and right-wing defenders of the social order'.⁹⁷ In both countries, this was seen by male leftists as a supposed betrayal of progressive sexuality.

⁹⁴Valerie, 'Sadomasochism', 6.

⁹⁵For more information on the judicial impact of the 'sexual revolution' on pornography and prostitution see Daniel Borrillo and Danièle Lochak, eds., *La liberté sexuelle*, (Presses universitaires de France, 2005).

⁹⁶The literal translation is 'the Stakhanovite of fucking'. Stakhanovites was the term used for hard-workers on the left, after the Russian miner Alexander Stakhanov. In this context it means men on the left who diligently had sex with lots of different women.

⁹⁷Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary Thought* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 180.

The distinction between the two arguably comes from the lack of organised moral purity campaigns like the *Nationwide Festival of Light*⁹⁸ Despite France being culturally Catholic, like the debates around abortion, organised Catholic opposition to pornography was stronger in Britain than in France. This was perhaps due to *laïcité*, but the stronger history of moral purity campaigns in Britain than France was possibly significant. As will be seen in the chapter on prostitution, British moral purity campaigns of the nineteenth-century influenced others across Europe. Organisations like *La Ligue Française pour le relèvement de la moralité publique*, which was founded in 1883, had dissolved in 1946 and after this there was no significant social conservative political organisation until the 1980s.⁹⁹ This is not to say there was no resistance to the proliferation of explicit films or images, but instead that, in France, unlike in Britain, the resistance was more abstract and did not result in specific organisations, like *The Festival of Light*, to stop this rise. Arguably this influenced the manner in which French feminists approached pornography, perhaps indicating why it received the little attention it did. It also meant the MLF avoided many of the difficult conversations on the similarity between feminist and moral purist views of pornography that would go on to plague the WLM in the late-1980s.

L'Histoire d'O, Violence and Objectification

As mentioned previously, the majority of French feminist discussion centred on the film *L'Histoire d'O*. The impetus for the campaigns came from a feature on the film in the French magazine *L'Express*.¹⁰⁰ The positive portrayal of the film angered many feminists, particularly because at the time the newspaper was

⁹⁸For more information on the response of French Catholics to the events of 1968 see Denis Pelletier, *La crise catholique. Religion, société, politique en France (1965–1978)* (Payot, 2002); the far-right see Todd Shepard, 'L'extrême droite et "Mai 68". Une obsession d'Algérie et de virilité', *CLIO: Femmes, Genre, Histoire* 29 (2009): 37-57.

⁹⁹See Jean-Yves Le Naour, 'Un mouvement anti-ponographique: La ligue pour le relèvement de la moralité publique (1883-1946)', *Histoire, économie et société* 22 (2003): 385-394.

¹⁰⁰'Le Courrier sur Histoire d'O', *L'Express*, September 22-28, 1975, See also, 'Madeleine Chapsal, 'Le choc d'Histoire d'O', *L'Express*, September 9, 1975. *L'Express* is a French weekly newspaper, founded in 1953, and in the 1970s had a generally left-wing editorial line, although it later moved further to the right.

seen as broadly sympathetic to left-wing causes. Like in Britain, French feminist criticisms of the film and, by extension, pornography, centred on two main areas: the objectification of women, and male sexual violence. Generally speaking, articles in feminist periodicals and magazines either focused on the film itself or on media discussions of it, using *L'Histoire d'O* as a reference point when discussing rape and female safety more generally. Unlike in the WLM, perhaps because *L'Histoire d'O* contained themes of sadomasochism, male violence and consent, the film received a more unified response from the French movement. In her discussion on the film, Jennifer L. Sweatman notes, 'in 1975 the struggle against sadomasochism and rape brought together what were becoming divergent strands in the MLF'.¹⁰¹

Although all groups connected male violence and pornography, the structure of the argument occasionally differed, shaped by their theoretical background. For example, although, as will be seen, they agreed with other feminists on the pernicious impact of *L'Histoire d'O*, *Psych et Po* paid little attention to pornography, compared to other issues like rape. *Choisir*, as a reformist organisation involved in rape trials, connected pornography to specific cases. For example, in a 1977 article on a Pau rape trial in *Choisir's* publication *La Cause des femmes*, Marie Odile Fargier explicitly connected *L'Histoire d'O* and society's views on rape. The article does not provide any details on the plot, which implies the film – and feminist campaigns around it – were well known to the publication's readers. Fargier described how literature and film had influenced the dominant, sexist view of sexuality that leads to the condoning of rape. Similar to many British anti-pornography feminists, Fargier focused on male sexuality and how male pleasure was often based on the objectification of, and violence against, women. For Fargier, 'une conception de la sexualité qui a permis à plusieurs générations de "prendre leur pied" à la lecture d'*Histoire d'O*' (a conception of sexuality which has allowed several generations to get their pleasure¹⁰² from reading *The Story of O*).¹⁰³

¹⁰¹Jennifer L. Sweatman, *The Risky Business of French Feminism: Publishing, Politics and Artistry* (Lexington Press, 2014), 70.

¹⁰²Translation note: The term 'prendre leur pied' can mean have fun or get pleasure from, but also has sexual connotations. So the author is stating that readers of the novel gain sexual pleasure from the story, but also find it fun in a non sexual sense.

Just as British radical/revolutionary feminists argued that specific examples of sexual violence could be connected to pornographic images, some French feminists likewise attempted to draw comparisons between the sexualisation of women and real-life crimes. For example, *Les Pétroleuses* and others connected the film to rape, specifically the 'Aix Trial'.¹⁰⁴ In a 1977 article describing the details of the trial, co-signed by various other feminist groups, including *Psych et Po*, the group connected consumerism, pornography and rape. The article is similar to the evidence given to the *Longford Report* by the WLM, as it was an attempt to provide a wider feminist view on pornography. They discussed how profits are made from women's bodies in pornographic films, but also note how the details in *L'Histoire d'O* influenced the broader culture. For them the victim-blaming element prevalent in rape trials was a direct result of a sexually violent media. They pointed to a line in *L'Histoire d'O* condoning the abuse of women – 'les femmes aiment ça' (women like that sort of thing) – as representative of this notion that all women secretly desired to be abused.¹⁰⁵ In another article in *Les Pétroleuses*, in 1977, 'Nicole' described the details of 'sexual tortures' that received an eight-page spread in *L'Express* and how this conversation threatened her: 'J'affirme, moi, femme, me sentir menacée par un discours qui me présuppose soumise à l'avance, consentante au viol, à la violence, à la torture' (I state that, I, as a woman, feel threatened by a discourse which assumes that I consent to rape, violence and torture).¹⁰⁶ For her, the threat of violence against women was sanctioned because of society's misogyny in a way that does not occur with racism. She argued since there are laws against inciting racial murder or hatred, there should be an equivalent for

¹⁰³Marie Odile Fargier, 'Le Viol Aux Assises de Pau', *Choisir, La Cause des femmes*, No.24, February 1977, 6.

¹⁰⁴The 1977 'Aix-Trial' concerned two Belgian tourists who had been raped while backpacking. The trial was highly significant in French feminist campaigns around rape. For more information, see Chapter Six.

¹⁰⁵*Ligue du droit des femmes, Les Pétroleuses, Psychanalyse et Politique, Librairie des femmes, Tribunal International des Crimes contre les femmes* (comité français), 'Histoire D' O ou le facisme sexuel', *Les Pétroleuses*, 1977, 3 (Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris, 396 PET Bul). The article was written collectively by the groups listed.

¹⁰⁶Nicole, 'Et Si Moi', 3.

inciting violence against women, although she does not go into specifics about what exactly constitutes an incitement.¹⁰⁷

In contrast to Britain, French feminists also drew broader international and political conclusions. For example, in the collectively written article previously cited, the authors commented on the ideas on sexuality and female consent in *L'Histoire d'O*, also contributed to the rape of women in fascist countries such as Chile and Spain.¹⁰⁸ The implication was that the film was merely a French example of a global problem, and that watching pornography was not the emblem of 'liberated' leftist men, as fascists watched the same. It demonstrated the extent to which the group felt part of a broader identity of 'women', and their focus on shared experiences as an integral part of women's liberation. It was also perhaps an attempt to counter any attempt to justify these attitudes as an expression of 'sexual liberation'. Even the title of the collective article indicated the belief that pornography, rape, and fascism were all connected. The connection of sexual behaviour to fascism or imperialism also occurred more strongly in MLF discussions on rape than in Britain (see Chapter Six). This suggests that, although pornography was not as potent a subject matter to the MLF, there was more solidarity of views on sexual violence and pornography than in the WLM, arguably because there was less discomfort by French socialist feminists about approaching pornography, and a less pervasive radical feminist analysis.

Unlike in Britain, French feminists were also less interested in discussing pornographic actresses, but were instead concerned with what films like *L'Histoire d'O* revealed about female sexuality. For example, 'Nicole' noted how the publicity for the film addressed itself towards women, with tag-lines such as 'Toute femme s'identifiera et s'attachera à "O", admirablement incarnée par Corinne Cléry' (Every woman will identify with and become attached to 'O', admirably played by Corinne Cléry'), and 'Toute femme conviendra que les chaînes que l'on n'a pas envie de briser sont celles qu'une femme passe elle-même à ses poignets lorsqu'un amour total la rend consentante à tout' (Every

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. See also *Les Pétoleuses*, 1977, 5-6 (Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris, 396 PET Bul).

woman will admit the chains she doesn't want to break are those with which she binds her own wrists, when a complete love makes her consent to anything).¹⁰⁹ Like in Britain, the connection of sexuality and fantasy was also raised, with the author dismissing the idea that the film should be classed as a representation of male and female sexual fantasies, with no bearing on reality.

As Zancarini-Fournel notes, it was the manner in which the film was advertised that feminists campaigned against most vociferously.¹¹⁰ The tag-line was targeting female viewers, playing off cultural assumptions around female sexuality.¹¹¹ For example, for the authors of '*L'Histoire d'O* ou le facisme sexuel', the film was publicising itself through women, and they refused to have it done in their name or gender.¹¹² Writing in 1980, Micheline Carrier noted how, despite the image of women in pornography, 'l'homme est omniprésent' (the man is omnipresent).¹¹³ For Carrier, furthermore: 'même en montrant des femmes nues, la porno imprimée célèbre le culte du phallus et défigure plus souvent qu'autrement la sexualité des femmes' (even when showing naked women, porn in print celebrates the cult of the phallus and more often than not, disfigures female sexuality).¹¹⁴ This was the problem for *Les Pétroleuses* and others with *L'Histoire d'O*, and by extension the objectification of women in both countries: the construction or eradication of female sexuality by and for men.

This can also be seen in discussions on the author of the novel. Although *L'Histoire d'O* was written by a woman, this was not revealed until 2008; at the time of the film's release, the author's gender was unknown. It was written from the perspective of a female protagonist, which meant feminists had to counter the claim that it revealed common sexual desires of women. In the article in *Les Pétroleuses*, 'Nicole' also touched upon the question of whether the author could be a woman and whether that should influence the way the material is

¹⁰⁹Nicole, 'Et Si Moi Femme', *Les Pétroleuses*, 1977, 3 (Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris, 396 PET Bul).

¹¹⁰Zancarini-Fournel, 'Notre corps', 218.

¹¹¹See for example Chapsal, 'Le choc', where the author points to *L'Histoire d'O* as an example of women having the same sexual appetite as men.

¹¹²*Ligue du Droit* et al., 'Histoire D' O', 3.

¹¹³Micheline Carrier, 'Pornographie', *Questions Féministes* 8 (1980): 15-41.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

viewed by feminists, claiming it was irrelevant, as: 'il est connu que les êtres assujettis par une puissance meurtrière sont souvent meurtris par leurs propres frères [...] Assujettie à un homme, une femme peut en assujettir d'autres. Ceci est connu.' (It is well known that people subjected to a murderous power are often abused by their own brothers [...] Although governed by a man, a woman is still able to subjugate others. This is well-known).¹¹⁵ As with the discussions in *Spare Rib* over pornographic actresses, this perhaps demonstrated how some feminists found it problematic to decide the extent to which a woman's sexual agency existed within an oppressive system, or whether women could collude with damaging representations of female sexuality.

L'Histoire d'O was clearly problematic for *Choisir*, *Les Pétroleuses*, and other feminists, but the lack of any broader discussion between pro-and anti-pornography feminists as occurred in Britain arguably demonstrated that, overall, the issue was less acrimonious for the MLF. As Marie-Anne Paveau notes there were no 'sex-wars' around pornography in France compared to Britain and the US.¹¹⁶ This was perhaps because the feminist discussion never really branched out from *L'Histoire d'O* to the same extent as in the British context. Rather, the MLF's approach to pornography should be viewed in the cultural context of opposing individual extreme exploitations of women's sexuality, rather than the opposition of pornography in general along ideological lines, as occurred in Britain.

Conclusion

Overall, pornography demonstrated the problems many in the WLM and MLF had with the legacy of 'sexual liberation', which may explain why so many of their discussions contained similar ideas. In both countries, feminists argued that there were limits to 'sexual freedom', that pornographic images did not exist within a vacuum, and that the impact of images on men and women was a valid subject for debate. Many in the two movements also connected pornographic images, sexual violence, and consumerism, and received criticisms from male

¹¹⁵Nicole, 'Et Si Moi Femme', 3.

¹¹⁶Marie-Anne Paveau, *Le discours pornographique* (La Musardine, 2014), 45. See also David Courbet, *Féminismes et pornographie* (La Musardine, 2013).

leftists over a supposed abandonment of progressive ideas on sexuality. However, there were subtle differences between the approaches in each country, as a result of broader cultural and social contexts. In France the role of a specific film was significant, and the *soixante-huitard* analysis of politics and sexuality shaped the way groups like *Les Pétroleuses* approached pornography. There was also a more unified response to *L'Histoire d'O*, and a more explicit conversation around female sexuality, pornography and fascism. In contrast, there was more direct action by the WLM, and the existence of a broader public discussion on pornography and morality meant they were forced to grapple with how to frame their arguments without seeming to side with moral conservatives. In addition, as with prostitution and rape, the clarity of radical/revolutionary feminist theory on pornography and 'male supremacy' meant that British socialist feminists had to figure out a response, leading to a conversation that would become much more divisive and acrimonious in the 1980s. Nevertheless, arguably, pornography proved to be difficult terrain for feminists in both countries, which resulted in abstract discussions, and less structured campaigning. To an extent, neither movement was able to reconcile the political and the personal when it came to pornography.

Chapter Five: Prostitution

As the majority of second-wave feminist activism on sexuality was based on the politicisation of personal experience, prostitution consequently proved a problematic issue for many feminists. In both movements, debates around prostitution occurred in a period of strong prostitute activism.¹ Prostitutes organised and protested, framing their grievances as part of the broader struggle against sexual and economic inequality. In other campaigns like abortion and rape, British and French feminists argued that women's bodily autonomy was paramount. Prostitute activists took this feminist idea of a woman's right to control her body to its logical extreme in their campaigns, even though they were often not part of women's liberation itself. Feminists therefore had to determine whether the prostitute cause was a feminist one, or whether prostitution was another patriarchal institution oppressive to all women. This chapter will compare two occupations by prostitutes, one in Lyon in 1975 and the other in London in 1982, and their relationship to women's liberation. Although there were similarities between the two, there were also differences that shaped the form they took. The wider discussions on prostitution within each movement will also be compared, in order to explore the place of prostitution in feminist debates. Due to the chronology of the prostitute strikes, the French situation will be examined first.

¹The 1980s was when the term 'sex-worker' began to be used more frequently than 'prostitute'. It was first coined in 1978 and referred to any women who worked in the sex-industry, including pornography and escort services. Generally speaking, pro-regulation/decriminalisation writers used the former term, abolitionist/prohibitionists the latter. However, in the period referred to in this chapter, although 'sex-worker' was beginning to be seen more, 'prostitute' was still used widely by all groups. In addition, the term 'prostituée' was almost exclusively used in France. As a result, the term 'prostitute' will be used throughout this chapter, with the caveat it was beginning to be ideologically loaded. For more information, see Frédérique Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander, eds., *Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry* (Cleis Press, 1987); Jill Nagle, *Whores and Other Feminists* (Routledge, 1997).

The History of Prostitution: Legislation and Debates in Britain and France

On both sides of the Channel, although to a greater extent in France, there had been alternating periods where prostitution was either tolerated or repressed. Generally speaking there are four main approaches to prostitution: prohibition, regulation, decriminalisation, and abolition.² Under prohibition, solicitation or prostitution are illegal, but are often treated more tolerantly in practice. Decriminalisation advocates the removal of all laws and regulation concerning prostitution. As will be seen, prostitute rights groups advocated a form of decriminalisation. For pro-regulators, prostitution itself should be legal, but only if certain conditions (for example the registration of prostitutes, the banning of brothels) are met. For abolitionists – who generally want prostitution to disappear altogether – prostitution is harmful to women and often leads to an increase in crime and abuse, although prostitutes themselves should not be arrested. This was often the most widespread approach in the feminist movements, although some feminists did also advocate decriminalisation or regulation. As Laurie Shrage notes, 'there is no single thing as "prostitution" that can be evaluated apart from a cultural framework'.³ As with pornography, what was considered prostitution varied by location, culture, and time period, and the structural details of how prostitutes worked differed between Britain and France. The feminist approach towards prostitution varied between the two countries, and the historical treatment of prostitution in each certainly played a part.

On both sides of the Channel, it was in the nineteenth-century that debates on prostitution and regulation increased in volume. In the early nineteenth-century, brothels – known as *maisons closes* or *maisons de tolérances* – appeared in France, and all prostitutes had to be registered by the police and undergo weekly health checks, although a number of unregistered

²For an overview of current international approaches to prostitution see Geetanjali Gangoli and Nicole Westmarland, eds., *International Approaches to Prostitution: Law and Policy in Europe and Asia* (Policy Press, 2006).

³Laurie Shrage, *Moral Dilemmas of Feminism: Prostitution, Adultery and Abortion* (Routledge, 1994), 119.

prostitutes working outside of the *maisons* remained.⁴ Significantly, the brothels were state-licensed, unlike their equivalents in Britain, and the brothel soon became an integral part of French culture, particularly in Paris, as demonstrated by the various literary and artistic representations of both the prostitute and the *maisons*.⁵ Charles Bernheimer notes how this focus on Parisian prostitutes by nineteenth-century French artists came from both a celebration and denial of female sexuality and eroticism, associating the female body with sexual pleasure, decay, and disease.⁶ The *maisons* often shaped how prostitution was discussed in France. They were run by women and frequented by the bourgeoisie, with the prostitutes viewed as being of a higher 'quality' and skill than those working on the street. In his history of prostitution in France, Alain Corbin notes that, from the early nineteenth-century onwards, prostitutes working within the *maisons* were trained in various sexual techniques when they joined the brothel. Corbin sees this as representing the change in sexual mores of the period, as what he terms 'aristocratic' tastes became more widespread.⁷

Historically, the regulationist approach was stronger in France, which resulted in the creation of the *maisons* but in Britain state regulation of prostitutes did increase following the passing of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1864-1869. Worried by the spread of venereal disease within the Armed Forces, the Acts allowed police to arrest anyone they suspected of being a prostitute, who was then subjected to compulsory checks for venereal disease. Arguably the regulationist approach was also tied up with dominant cultural ideas around sexuality, morality, and class, especially in Britain. Foucault

⁴Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850* (Harvard University Press, 1996), 5. See also Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Duke University Press, 1989); Alain Corbin, 'Commercial Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century France: A System of Images and Regulations', *Representations* 14 (1986): 209-219.

⁵See for example, Honoré de Balzac, *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (1838-1857); Emile Zola, *Nana* (1880) and the works of Edouard Manet, such as *Olympia* (1863) and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, such as *Salon at the Rue des Moulins* (1894) and *The Medical Inspection at the Rue des Moulins Brothel* (1899).

⁶Bernheimer, *Figures*, 200.

⁷Corbin, *Women for Hire*, 20.

described the stereotypes of the Victorians as prudish and unwilling to discuss sex as 'the repressive hypothesis', and argued that discourses around sexuality were more widespread in the nineteenth-century than commonly thought, within a broad range of contexts.⁸ For the Victorians, prostitution was necessary to ensure that the demands of male sexuality were met, while notions of female sexual pleasure were non-existent. A woman was either the 'angel in the house', the dominant ideal of the submissive, pure middle-class wife, or a 'fallen woman' like a prostitute. Prostitution, therefore, was seen as necessary to ensure both the purity of middle-class women and a healthy male sexuality.

In Britain, there was organised opposition to the Acts by moral purity campaigners and first-wave feminists including Josephine Butler and her organisation the *Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts*.⁹ The opposition to the Acts centred on the sexual double standard apparent in prosecuting prostitutes but not their male clients, and the impact of forced arrest and medical examinations on women. In France, despite stronger regulation of prostitution, there was much less organised campaigning around the subject.¹⁰ In both countries, however, prostitution was discussed within the context of sexuality, not economics or class as in the 1970s. Butler et al. presented their campaigns as defending morality, based on the differing constructions of male and female sexuality. Butler believed that women had

⁸See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (Vintage, 1990 edition).

⁹The organisation was founded in 1869 by Josephine Butler and Elizabeth Wolstenholme in response to the Contagious Diseases Acts. Their campaigning led to the repeal of the acts in 1886. For more information on the LNA see Josephine Butler, *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (1896) (Cambridge University Press, 2010). For more information on the context around the Acts and the response by campaigners see Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1980); id., *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (University of Chicago Press, 1992); E.M Sigworth and T.J Wyke, 'A Study of Victorian Prostitution and Venereal Disease', in *Suffer and Be Still. Women in the Victorian Age*, ed. Martha Vicinius (Methuen, 1972); Paula Bartley, *Prostitution: Prevention & Reform in England, 1860–1914* (Routledge, 1999).

¹⁰Corbin, *Women for Hire*, 25. For more information on fears of venereal disease and prostitution see Roger Davidson and Lesley A. Hall, *Sex, Sin and Suffering: Venereal Disease and European Society since 1870* (Routledge, 2001).

more self-control and were more moral than men, and should help men control their aggressive sexuality: their 'beast within'.¹¹ Despite the focus on helping prostitutes, and arguing that male sexual behaviour should not go unchecked, Butler et al. were far from sympathetic towards those prostitutes who refused help. As Lucy Bland notes, there were debates on whether prostitutes wanted to be saved, and those who did not were seen as undeserving of support.¹² Therefore, prostitutes were seen either as passive victims of seduction and the sexual double standard, or immoral, unrepentant women.

Bland argues that feminist campaigners in the nineteenth-century had a fear of prostitutes that 'spoke in part of their fears of the dangers of sex with men', and although this was not true for feminists in the 1970s, there was perhaps a wariness about discussing prostitution by some second-wave feminists.¹³ Despite different views on sexuality in each wave, arguably there was reluctance by feminists in both periods to really engage with questions of female autonomy and prostitution. They may not have moralised to the same extent as Butler, but, as will be seen later in this chapter, some second-wave feminists found it difficult to reconcile their distrust of prostitution as an institution with the experiences of individual women, which often led to a sidelining of the sexual agency of prostitutes.

Butler was an abolitionist. When she discovered that the French system was highly regulated, she organised an international coalition of reformers of both sexes called the *British and Continental Federations against the State Regulation of Vice* whose ultimate goal was to demolish the French regulation system.¹⁴ This approach grew in popularity in the twentieth-century, and soon France had a strong abolitionist movement, with the *International Abolitionist*

¹¹Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism Sex and Morality* (Tauris Parke, 2002), 32. See also Walkowitz, *Dreadful Delight* and Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹²Bland, *Banishing*, 32.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Karen M. Offen, *European Feminisms 1700–1900: A Political History* (Stanford University Press, 2000), 155.

Federation and its journal the *Revue Abolitionniste* being based there.¹⁵ The abolitionist campaign was successful in changing the legal position of French prostitution.¹⁶ The *maisons* were closed down under the 'Loi Marthe Richard' (Marthe Richard Law) in 1946, which also made procuring, pimping, and soliciting illegal. Following the ratification of the *UN Conventions on the Suppression of Trafficking and the Exploitation of Prostitution* in 1950, which aimed to outlaw any discriminatory measures against prostitutes, France became, in theory, even more abolitionist. As Corbin notes, however, this legislation was adopted but not implemented, and in the 1970s the police were still fining and arresting prostitutes, and registering them on their books.¹⁷ Indeed, as will be discussed later in this chapter, it was such police behaviour that led to the occupation of Saint-Nizier Church by prostitutes in Lyon.

Across the Channel, the legal situation by the 1970s was similar. Prostitution itself was not illegal, but solicitation was. In England, under the Sexual Offences Act 1956 and the Street Offences Acts of 1959, it was illegal to keep a brothel, or live on the earnings of prostitution.¹⁸ The 1959 act also

¹⁵For more information on abolitionism in France since the 1960s see Lilian Mathieu, 'The Debate on Prostitution in France: A Conflict between Abolitionism, Regulation and Prohibition', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 12:2 (2004): 153-163; Amy G. Mazur, 'Prostitute Movements face elite apathy and gender-based universalism in France', in *The Politics of Prostitution: Women's Movements, Democratic States and the Globalization of Sex Commerce*, ed. Joyce Outshoom (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 123-143; Gill Allwood, 'Prostitution debates in France', *Contemporary Politics* 10:2 (2004): 145-157.

¹⁶For more information on prostitution in the twentieth century see Julia Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens: Commercial Sex in London, 1885-1960* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Neil P. McKeganey and Marina Barnard, *Sex Work on the Streets: Prostitutes and their Clients* (Open University Press, 1996).

¹⁷Corbin, *Women for Hire*, 360.

¹⁸Sexual Offences Act 1956:

'(1) It is an offence for a person--

(a) to procure a woman to become, in any part of the world, a common prostitute; or

(b) to procure a woman to leave the United Kingdom, intending her to become an inmate of or frequent a brothel elsewhere; or

(c) to procure a woman to leave her usual place of abode in the United Kingdom, intending her to become an inmate of or frequent a brothel in any part of the world for the purposes of prostitution.'

continued the use of the controversial term 'common prostitute', first used in the Vagrancy Act of 1824.¹⁹ This was a term only applied to women and not men, and usually determined by the police.²⁰ Once labelled a 'common prostitute', a woman risked being arrested at any point by the police on suspicion of soliciting. There had been campaigns against the term since the 1920s and it was a frequent point of contention in prostitute campaigns for legal reform.²¹ As in France, the issue was that once women were registered as having committed solicitation, they were defined as prostitutes and consequently harassed and consistently fined by the police. As will be seen later in this chapter, it was this anger at being defined solely as a prostitute, and the resulting harassment and constraints from the authorities, that contributed to the protests by prostitutes' rights groups.

Man living on earnings of prostitution

'(1) It is an offence for a man knowingly to live wholly or in part on the earnings of prostitution.

(2) For the purposes of this section a man who lives with or is habitually in the company of a prostitute, or who exercises control, direction or influence over a prostitute's movements in a way which shows he is aiding, abetting or compelling her prostitution with others, shall be presumed to be knowingly living on the earnings of prostitution, unless he proves the contrary'.

13. Woman exercising control over prostitute

'It is an offence for a woman for purposes of gain to exercise control, direction or influence over a prostitute's movements in a way, which shows she is aiding, abetting or compelling her prostitution'.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/4-5/69/part/II/crossheading/prostitution-procuration-etc/enacted>

Accessed December 13, 2015.

¹⁹'It shall be an offence for a common prostitute to loiter or solicit in a street or public place for the purpose of prostitution.'

²⁰*R v De Munck (1918) 82 J.P. 160* CCA stated that 'the term "common prostitute" is not limited so as to mean only one who permits acts of lewdness with all and sundry, or with such as have her, when such acts are in the nature of ordinary sexual connection. We are of the opinion that prostitution is proved if it is shown that a woman offers her body commonly for lewdness for payment in return'. For more information, see Helen J. Self, *Prostitution, Women and Misuse of the Law: The Fallen Daughters of Eve* (Routledge, 2004).

²¹See Laite, *Common Prostitutes*.

France

Feminist debates on prostitution were mostly triggered by prostitute activism in both countries. British and French feminists reacted differently to such events, with various French groups such as *Les Pétroleuses*, *Cercle Flora Tristan* (Flora Tristan Circle), and *Cercle Elizabeth Dimitriev* (Elizabeth Dimitriev Circle) expressing their support.²² In addition, despite the support of the quasi-Marxist feminist group WFH for the *English Collective of Prostitutes* (ECP) in Britain, French feminists were more comfortable discussing the connections between prostitution, class and bourgeois morality, as will be explored.

The Lyon Occupation



Figure 5.1: Occupation of Saint-Nizier Church June 2 1975. Originally appeared in *L'Express*, June 3 1975.

²²See for example, *Les Pétroleuses*, 'Ce n'est pas un sexe', *Les Pétroleuses*, 1977, 27 (Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris, 396 PET Bul). Anonymous, 'Mais qui se soucie vraiment de la prostitution?', *Choisir, La Cause des femmes* No.28, October 1977, 11.

On June 2, 1975 100-150 prostitutes walked into the Saint-Nizier church in Lyon, and would remain there for more than a week.²³ These events are viewed by historians and sociologists of prostitution as helping to inspire the similar London occupation, and the birth of the global sex-workers movement.²⁴ The American feminist Kate Millett described it as 'like a bomb exploding all through Europe' due to the sheer power of prostitutes going on strike, issuing demands, and occupying a church.²⁵ The occupation can be traced back to an earlier campaign in 1972.²⁶ In August of that year anonymous accusations revealed that police officers from the 'brigade des mœurs'²⁷ had been pimping, and that some local politicians were giving 'protection' to customers of the *hôtels de passe*.²⁸ As mentioned above, the *maisons* had been officially outlawed in France following the Second World War. *Hôtels de passe* had often sprung up in their place. These were hotels dedicated to prostitution, where rooms could be rented for a short time. Similar to *maisons* in allowing prostitutes to stay off the street, there were some significant differences. In a *maison* the customer had to pay the 'taulier' (madam) for the pass to gain access, from which the prostitute received no money, and the prostitute often had little freedom in deciding their hours or choosing their clients. The *hôtels* were frequented by many prostitutes as they were safe and clean, the women were relatively autonomous and could choose their own work schedule, and the payment of the room and pass were separate, giving them a higher cut of the money.

²³For more detailed information, see Georges Richard-Molard, *Avec les prostituées: l'enjeu d'un combat* (Chalet, 1976).

²⁴Elcin Kurbanoglu, 'What makes sex workers strike: A comparative analysis of France (1975) and the UK (1982)', *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 36 (2011): 164. See also Shannon Bell, *Reading, Writing and Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (Indiana University Press, 1994), 104; Nickie Roberts, *Whores in History: Prostitution in Western Society* (Harper Collins, 1992), 347.

²⁵Kate Millett, *The Prostitution Papers* (Avon Books, 1973), 5.

²⁶Lilian Mathieu, *La mobilisation de prostituées* (Belin, 2001), 109-110; Corbin, *Women for Hire*, 360; Kurbanoglu, 'What makes', 169.

²⁷Vice squad equivalent.

²⁸Mathieu, *La mobilisation*, 38; Barbara, Christine de Coninck, *La partagée* (Les Éditions de Minuit, 1977), 45.

Although France had officially attempted to remove discriminatory measures against prostitutes, in practice this was often not the case. The police unofficially sanctioned the *hôtels*, and a prostitute would be registered and left alone if she worked in one. Following a threat to close these *hôtels* after the 1972 scandal, a group of prostitutes decided to protest, a protest which was ultimately unsuccessful. After the scandal, the police were under pressure to show there was no more corruption or connections to the world of crime. As Mathieu notes, they consequently began to be more aggressive and arbitrary in their dealings with prostitutes. For example, as prostitution was not itself illegal, police started fining prostitutes for displaying an 'attitude de nature à provoquer' (solicitation, provocative behaviour).²⁹ They also dredged up an old law on repeat offenders, which had not been applied, so that prostitutes who got two identical convictions in the same year were not fined but sent to prison for three to eight days.³⁰ Prostitutes complained they were being brought in merely for smiling, or standing in the street. Just as with the ECP and the term 'common prostitute', likewise, for prostitutes in Lyon, the problem was with prostitutes harassed simply for being. The tacit, unofficial acceptance of practices that had existed before had gone, and it seemed as if prostitution itself was being legally attacked.

Alongside this renewed focus from the police, the authorities were unable to solve a series of horrific tortures and murders of prostitutes that occurred in 1975. This combination of police harassment but no police protection was what led a number of prostitutes to collectively occupy Saint-Nizier church. Surprisingly, neither the Lyon prostitutes nor the ECP strongly focused on the vulnerability of prostitutes, despite the murders in Lyon and the so-called

²⁹Lilian Mathieu, 'Prostituées et féministes en 1975 et 2002: l'impossible reconduction d'une alliance', *Travail, Genre et Sociétés* 10 (2003): 31; *La mobilisation*, 107; Millett, *Prostitution Papers*, 5.

³⁰Claude Jaget, ed., *Prostitutes Our Life*, trans. Anna Furse (Falling Wall Press, 1980), 41; Roberts, *Whores*, 286; Corbin, *Women for Hire*, 359; Mathieu, *La mobilisation*, 109-110.

'Yorkshire Ripper' murders in Britain.³¹ Highlighting how the murder of prostitutes was often ignored by society would have been a concern relevant to feminist demands. However, although the murders in Lyon were the impetus for the occupation, the focus of the striking prostitutes moved away from this topic. Instead their main focus was on economics.

Unlike in Britain then, the events of 1975 were the direct consequence of previous activism by French prostitutes. Sociologists who have studied the occupation such as Mathieu and Kurbanoglu have pointed to the new 'permissive society' as a significant influence on prostitutes' newfound campaigning drive.³² Mathieu notes that the activism of sex-workers was part of the broader wave of 'deviant' groups entering the public sphere and demanding equal rights.³³ Kurbanoglu also points to France's 'protest culture' as a significant element.³⁴ Claude Jaget, a journalist with *Libération*, who was granted interviews with all the prostitutes on strike, also argued that their protest was a legacy of and part of 1960s radicalism and protest.³⁵ In addition, according to Roberts, it was fear of new sexual freedoms and the supposed disintegration of traditional morality that led to the stricter police approach to prostitution.³⁶ Certainly the 'sexual revolution' and protest culture impacted the occupation, insofar as it gave prostitutes a context in which to place their campaigns. What has not been emphasised however, was the motivation of prostitutes in both countries to redefine prostitution as a job like any other, disconnecting it from sexuality. Arguably, prostitutes did not see their campaigns as attempts to make society more sexually liberal, but to shift the

³¹Peter Sutcliffe was convicted of killing 13 women in the Leeds and Bradford Area in 1981. Press coverage of the murders was significant to the activism of many British feminists on rape. See Chapter Six. For more information on the feminist discussion on Sutcliffe see Eileen Fairweather, 'Leeds: Curfew on Men', *Spare Rib* No.83, June 1979, 6-9; Wendy Holloway, "I Just wanted to kill a woman" Why? The Ripper and Male Sexuality', *Feminist Review* 9 (1981): 73

³²Kurbanoglu, 'What makes', 173; Mathieu, *La mobilisation*, 30. See also Corbin, *Women for Hire*, 355.

³³Mathieu, *La mobilisation*, 33.

³⁴Kurbanoglu, 'What makes', 163.

³⁵Jaget, *Prostitutes*, 26.

³⁶Roberts, *Whores*, 283.

focus of debate on prostitution from sexuality to economics, class, and police brutality.

Both occupations occurred in churches, but there is no evidence that this was in order to make any broader anti-Catholic or anti-religious point. Arguably it was just a convenient central public space, but the symbolism of prostitutes occupying a Christian and 'moral' space cannot be discounted.³⁷ Mathieu also notes that the church was one of the few spaces the police would find difficult to enter to break up the occupation.³⁸ As noted in an article by *Wages For Housework*: 'the church is supposed to be the centre for morality. By occupying the churches, the women were demanding that all those who chatter about morality take a position against the government's robbery with violence of prostitute women'.³⁹ Unlike in Britain, the French prostitutes were arguably more aware of the need for wider publicity, because the occupation built on months of previous activism, and they selected spokeswomen from the group to deal with outside enquiries. This resulted in a broader awareness of their demands. For example, their grievances had been publicised in April of that same year, when 'Ulla' (one of their de facto spokeswomen) had appeared on a French television series talking about the problems faced by prostitutes. This was soon followed by a flurry of media appearances and interviews.⁴⁰ They also communicated through open letters, to both the people of Lyon, and the broader national political establishment, and set up a video recorder to relay testimonies from the strikers to those outside the church.⁴¹ This may explain why feminists from *Cercle Flora Tristan*, *Cercle Elizabeth Dimitriev* and others were more supportive of the occupation than the WLM. As the occupation received more public attention, they saw it as an example of women taking on

³⁷For an analysis of political spaces in a religious context see Claude Grignon, 'Sur les relations entre les transformations du champ religieux et les transformations de l'espace politique', *Actes de recherche* 16 (1977): 3-34.

³⁸Mathieu, *La mobilisation*, 45.

³⁹Anonymous 'The State is the Biggest Pimp', International Wages for Housework Campaign, *Power of Women*, No.5, 1976, 14.

⁴⁰Mathieu, *La mobilisation*, 43- 45.

⁴¹Mathieu, *La mobilisation*, 43.

the establishment, in contrast to the WLM who discussed the London occupation in the context of prostitution.

Both occupations published similar lists of demands, and presented themselves as simply mothers trying to look after their children. For example, the very first demand of the French prostitute occupiers defined them as citizens and mothers, with the line 'nous proposons: impositions non-abusives, donnant droit à la Sécurité Sociale et à la retraite, comme toutes les Françaises mères de famille (We propose: non-punitive taxes giving us the right to social security and pensions, like every French woman who is a mother).⁴² As seen in the testimonies from prostitutes recorded by Jaget, motherhood was extremely important in the sex-worker campaigns. One woman, for example, stated how many prostitutes were against abortion as their only interest in life was having children, to have something that was just their own.⁴³ As in Britain, they placed banners outside the church universalising their struggle through motherhood, for example 'Nos Enfants ne Veulent pas Leur Mère en Prison' (Our Children Don't Want Their Mother In Prison) and distributed tracts claiming that the Minister of the Interior was threatening to take their children away from them.⁴⁴ This connected their validity as citizens to their maternity, and may also have been a tactical attempt to desexualise the prostitutes, defining themselves as mothers first and not sexual objects. Yet this was obviously markedly different from the arguments being put forward by feminists, where abortion was a central tenet of the campaigns, and motherhood a more complicated subject.

Much like their British counterparts, the French prostitutes emphasised police harassment and called for prostitution to be accepted as a legitimate form of work, stating that 'la prostitution est un métier dû au déséquilibre sexuel de la société' (prostitution is a job due to the sexual inequality of society).⁴⁵ They called for the abolition of the fines and prison sentences they argued were handed out indiscriminately, and the repeal of Article 34's 'l'incitation à

⁴²Ibid., 82; Barbara, de Coninck, *La partagée*, 78.

⁴³Jaget, *Prostitutes*, 110.

⁴⁴Barbara, de Coninck, *La partagée*, 84; Roberts, *Whores*, 344; Mathieu, 'Prostituées', 31.

⁴⁵Barbara, de Coninck, *La partagée*, 78; See also Lilian Mathieu, 'Débat d'étudiants avec des prostituées à l'université de Lyon II en avril 1976', *CLIO: Femmes, Genres, Histoire* 17 (2003): 175-185.

debaucher'.⁴⁶ However, unlike the British prostitute occupiers, the demands were often connected to the state and French society. For example, they explicitly declared 'nous voulons être citoyennes à part entière', (we want to be full and equal citizens), reaffirming their position within the republic, unlike their British counterparts.⁴⁷ They called for the reopening of the *hôtels* and the 'application des lois permettant la réinsertion de la femme prostituée dans la Société' (implementation of laws to allow the reinsertion/rehabilitation of prostitutes into society), alongside meetings with various government ministers, including Françoise Giroud, the new Minister for Women.⁴⁸

Arguably, this focus was a legacy of the relationship between the French state and prostitution that had started with the creation of the *maisons* and regulationist approach in the nineteenth-century. For example, the activists stated that they did not want the *maisons* to be reopened or to become 'nationalisées' (nationalised), or prostitutes to become 'des fonctionnaires du sexe sans aucune liberté' (civil servants of sex without freedom).⁴⁹ While the British prostitutes demanded an end to arbitrary arrests and the naming of women as 'common prostitutes', they did not go as far as to demand a radical overhaul of the relationship between the state and the prostitute. The significance of national citizenship, and debates over how to define the term have played a significant role in French national identity, unlike in Britain.⁵⁰ As

⁴⁶Barbara, de Coninck, *La partagée*, 78; Anonymous, 'La Loi des Hommes' (1975 tract), in *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes: Textes premiers*, eds. Cathy Bernheim et al. (Stock, 2009), 231.

⁴⁷Mathieu, *La mobilisation*, 118-119. Ideas around equal citizenship and active citizenship did underpin demands for gender equality by some women's groups in the early twentieth century, but was not as influential on later feminist campaigns as in France. For more information, see Caitriona Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928 – 64* (Manchester University Press, 2013).

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹Barbara, de Coninck, *La partagée*, 82. By freedom they meant the freedom to set their own hours, keep the majority of their pay without state interference, as they had been able to in the hotels. For more information on the response to Giroud as Minister for Women, see Claire Duchén, *Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterrand*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 127.

the MLAC and others had done in the abortion campaigns, in highlighting their place as French citizens, the prostitutes implicitly linked their campaign to this, arguing their demands represented rights the republic owed them, unlike in the British context.

The occupation soon received media attention, and in contrast to Britain, where sex-worker activism was largely restricted to London, spread from Lyon to other cities across France, including Paris and Marseille.⁵¹ Despite this, the occupation did not last long, and police forcibly ousted the women from the church on June 10. The equivalent protests in Paris and Marseille also sputtered out. In spite of the failure of their demands, the occupation was successful in publicising the grievances of the prostitutes in Lyon, linking economic inequality and prostitution, as well as helping inspire other protests such as those of the ECP and COYOTE in the United States.⁵²

The Occupation and Outsiders: The MLF and *Le Mouvement du Nid*

As argued above, prostitute activism was tangentially connected to the broader left-wing radicalism of this period. Consequently, in both countries, outside groups (including the MLF) had to decide how they should engage with the prostitutes' campaigns. For example, as Barbara (real name Mireille Dekoninck), one of the leaders of the French group, noted:

Toute la presse de gauche et d'extrême gauche se bouscule pour venir nous voir. Les partis politiques veulent comprendre nos motifs. Pourquoi nous sommes-nous engagées dans une pareille lutte? Ça les tracasse: ils ne veulent pas se fourrer dans une mauvaise histoire en nous soutenant.

(All the left and far-left press were elbowing each other to come

⁵⁰See for example Alistair Cole, *French Politics and Society* (Routledge, 2015), 195-213; Jeremy Jennings, 'Citizenship, Republicanism and Multiculturalism in Contemporary France', *British Journal of Political Science* 30:4 (2000), 575-598.

⁵¹For more information, see Mathieu, *La mobilisation*, 65-71; id., 'Débat', 177; id., 'Prostituées', 31-43 and Barbara, de Coninck, *La partagée*, 55-80.

⁵²Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics (COYOTE) was an American prostitutes' rights organisation, founded in 1973 by Margo St James. Their beliefs were similar to the ECP as they believed prostitution should be considered labour equivalent to any other job.

see us. The political parties wanted to understand our motives. Why had we taken on such a struggle? It really worried them. They didn't want to get mixed-up in a bad business by supporting us).⁵³

Unlike in Britain, two of the groups that attempted to create some sort of dialogue with the French prostitutes were groups from the MLF, and *Le Mouvement du Nid*. There was no equivalent to *Le Nid* (The Nest) in the British context, but the organisation played a meaningful role in the French occupation and impacted how the French prostitutes discussed and campaigned in Lyon.

Le Nid was the main French proponent of the Christian abolitionist view of prostitution, which had started with the campaigns of Butler et al. A Catholic group, they aimed to abolish any forms of regulation or surveillance of prostitutes.⁵⁴ They were somewhat awkwardly placed between left-wing activists and the church. As Mathieu notes, unlike the women from the MLF who only gave their support to the campaign once it had already started, *Le Nid* had been involved from an earlier stage, and took a more significant role in the preparation of the occupation.⁵⁵ For example, as a religious group, *Le Nid* were instrumental in persuading the church authorities to support the occupation, in contrast to the British context.⁵⁶ In addition, unlike the British prostitute occupiers, the group had been supporting prostitutes against police harassment for many years, for example, by helping fund defence lawyers or organisational support. Writing in 1977, Barbara described the importance of *Le Nid* to the prostitutes:

Si le mouvement des femmes prostituées de Lyon a pu se former, c'est grâce à la confiance que nous ont témoignée les gens du Nid [...] Ils ont affirmé qu'ils étaient à nos côtés et nous on assuré: "Vous êtes capables de parler, capables de vous défendre vous-mêmes.

⁵³Barbara, de Coninck, *La partagée*, 74.

⁵⁴Lilian Mathieu, 'An Unlikely Mobilization: The Occupation of Saint-Nizier Church by the Prostitutes of Lyon', *Revue française de sociologie* 42 (2001): 113.

⁵⁵Mathieu, 'Prostituées', 33. See also 'Entretien avec quatre militantes du Nid' in Mathieu, *La mobilisation*, 55.

⁵⁶ Mathieu, 'An Unlikely Mobilization', 117.

(If the prostitute movement in Lyon was able to be created, it was thanks to the trust *Le Nid* have shown us [...] They told us they were on our side, and assured us “you are capable of speaking and defending yourselves on your own”).⁵⁷

Once the prostitutes had occupied the church, *Le Nid* lobbied on their behalf to the police and judiciary in Lyon.⁵⁸ Much like the prostitutes themselves, their correspondence focused on demands for the cessation of arbitrary fines and detentions, alongside complaints about police behaviour.⁵⁹ Moreover, they also reframed the argument as the rights of citizens of the French republic, for example, asking: 'La personne prostituée ne mérite-t-elle pas d'être protégée comme n'importe quel citoyen?' (Does a prostitute not deserve to be protected like any other citizen?)⁶⁰ Although acknowledging the influence of *Le Nid* as an external force to the occupation of the church, Kurbanoglu claims the French prostitute movement was less organised than its British counterpart, pointing to the involvement of WFH as an example.⁶¹ I would disagree, on both counts. Arguably the French prostitutes were more organised, as a result of their involvement with *Le Nid*. For example, their communication with the police and establishment was stronger and more detailed, and their occupation had been planned over a longer period, while, as will be seen, the British equivalent was arguably more of a reaction, influenced

⁵⁷Mathieu, *La mobilisation*, 50.

⁵⁸See for example, A. Bissardon (Responsable de la section à Lyon) to Le Préfet délégué pour la police de Lyon, April 23, 1975; Paul Noirot-Cosson to Le Préfet délégué pour la police de Lyon, May 29, 1975; Michel de Verclos (Le Président national du Mouvement du Nid) to Le Préfet délégué pour la police de Lyon, May 31, 1975. All cited in Barbara, de Coninck, *La partagée*, 56-62. For more information on the connections between left-wing religious organisations and the political sphere in France see Grignon, 'Sur les relations', 3-34.

⁵⁹A similar approach was taken by some women's groups, like the Mothers' Union, in 1950s Britain. For more information, see Caitriona Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928 – 64* (Manchester University Press, 2013); Carol Smart, *Feminism and the Power of the Law* (Routledge, 1989).

⁶⁰Barbara, de Coninck, *La partagée*, 57.

⁶¹Kurbanoglu, 'What makes', 163-179.

by the French situation, than a pro-active campaign.⁶² Furthermore, as an abolitionist organisation with a long history of advocacy, *Le Nid* had more influence on the occupation than any other group in either country, providing a context and 'respectable' face to the occupation, as demonstrated by their attempts at lobbying on behalf of the occupiers.

Following the occupation, some feminist groups began to take an interest in the prostitutes' cause. The MLF was in some sort of a lull at the time, following the successful passing of the 'Loi Veil' decriminalising abortion that year. Unlike the British context, this meant the movement was arguably still near its zenith of organisation and enthusiasm, but without a concrete aim to coalesce around. This may explain why some Lyon feminists made more attempts at supporting the church occupation than in Britain. Two significant groups were *Cercle Flora Tristan* and *Cercle Elizabeth Dimitriev*. The former were attached to the MLF, while the latter were more strongly Marxist. The number of women who took an interest in the occupation was small, and their help took the form of distributing tracts and leaflets outside the church.⁶³ In addition, *Cercle Flora Tristan* published an article in *Les Pétroleuses* in 1975, which argued that the MLF should support the prostitutes due to the feminist nature of their cause.⁶⁴ In these tracts one can see the difficult balancing act prevalent in many feminist discussions on prostitution in both countries, between supporting prostitutes, without implying support of prostitution as an institution.

Unlike in Britain, where some feminists reframed prostitution as an example of a low-paid, unstable job, the feminist tracts in Lyon centred more on

⁶²See for example Selma James, 'Hookers in the House of the Lord', in *Sex, Race and Class, The Perspective of Winning: A Selection of Writings, 1952-2011*, eds. Selma James, Marcus Rediker and Nina Lopez (PM Press, 2012), 110-130 where James describes the reactive origins of the occupation and the influence of the French occupation.

⁶³Mathieu, *La mobilisation*, 59.

⁶⁴*Cercle Flora Tristan*, 'Toutes solidaires avec les femmes prostituées en lutte', *Les Pétroleuses*, 1977, 7 (Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris, 396 PET Bul). See also Anonymous 'Mais qui se soucie vraiment de la prostitution?' *Choisir, La Cause des femmes* No.28, October 1977, 1; Texte 5.9, *Cercle Flora Tristan* du MLF, June 9, 1975, in *The Condition of Women in France: 1945 to the Present – A Documentary Anthology*, ed. Claire Laubier (Routledge, 2003), 45.

demands to stop arbitrary fines, and the 'incitation à débaucher' amendment, doubtless because that was the context the prostitutes themselves had advocated. Few feminists in either movement had any experience of the realities of prostitution. This led some to look for connections between prostitutes and other women, perhaps to create a sense of solidarity. Whereas some in the WLM highlighted how women had traditionally been divided into 'pure' and 'fallen', some French feminists attempted to connect the exploitation of prostitutes to the general sexual oppression women experienced every day. For example, in an anonymous 1975 tract, they wrote:

Nous refusons l'hypocrisie d'une loi d'hommes qui tolère et encourage la prostitution alors qu'elle frappe et exploite les prostituées. Nous refusons cette loi d'hommes qui se soutient de la loi des hommes autorisant n'importe lequel d'entre eux à nous racoler, nous siffler, nous suivre et nous insulter dans la rue parce que nous sommes des femmes.

(We refuse to accept the hypocrisy of a law created by men that tolerates and encourages prostitution while punishing and exploiting prostitutes. We refuse to accept a law created by men based on a male convention which allows any man to solicit us, whistle at us, follow us, and insult us in the street, just because we are women).⁶⁵

Some also compared the prostitute to the role of a wife, or woman. For example one Lyon feminist wrote: 'Qui avec son patron, qui avec son mari, pour garder son emploi et sa sécurité matérielle [...] il n'y a pas que sur le trottoir que les femmes sont amenées à se prostituer' (Who hasn't done it with their boss, who

⁶⁵Anon, 'La Loi', 230, and also Anonymous 'Nous Femmes', (1975 tract) in Bernheim et al., *Mouvement*, 231-232; Texte 5.17, *Femmes travailleuses en lutte*, No.4, 1975, in Laubier, *Condition*, 50.

hasn't with their husband, in order to maintain her job or her material comforts [...] it isn't just on the street that women are prone to prostitution).⁶⁶

In addition, unlike in Britain, this arguably led to the MLF discussing what prostitution revealed about female sexuality. For example, in a 1977 article *La Cause des femmes*, the author asked 'étions nous toutes des prostituées? Les prostituées étaient elles toute le prototype de la femme libérée? (Were we all prostitutes? Were prostitutes the prototype of the liberated woman?)'⁶⁷

Underlining shared female experiences perhaps moved the conversation away from what prostitution revealed about male sexuality and its negative impact on women, and towards female solidarity, an easier cause, in theory, for feminists to support. Yet, in both movements, there was some questioning (on both sides) about the relationship between the prostitute occupiers and feminists. For example, there were worries that the occupation had been covertly instigated by pimps and not the prostitutes, and so consequently should not be supported.⁶⁸

In addition, like in the WLM, some in the MLF found it hard to define their approach when confronted with examples of sexuality and female autonomy that went against their previous ideals. As for the WLM, the difficulty for French feminists was whether it was possible to support prostitutes without supporting prostitution. For example, one feminist stated:

Ce que voulaient les femmes de Saint-Nizier n'était pas ce que nous voulions. On n'a pas su exactement si on devait exprimer nos propres positions sur la prostitution, quitte à ce qu'elles

⁶⁶Centre Lyonnais d'Études Féministes, *Chronique d'une passion: le mouvement de libération des femmes à Lyon* (L'Harmattan, 1989), 66. See also *Les Pétroleuses*, 'Nous sommes toutes prostituables', *Les Pétroleuses*, 1976, 10 (Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris, 396 PET Bul). The idea that marriage and prostitution were two sides of the same coin was not a new one. In *Le deuxième sexe*, for example, Simone de Beauvoir discussed how marriage was a form of prostitution, with a woman bartering her sexuality for monetary comforts. See also *Cercle Flora Tristan*, 'La Cause des femmes' (1975 bulletin) in Bernheim et al., *Mouvement*, 234.

⁶⁷Anon, 'Mais qui se soucie vraiment', 11. See also Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, 'Notre corps, nous-mêmes', in *Le siècle des féminismes*, eds. Éliane Gubin et al. (Les Éditions de l'Atelier, 2004), 215.

⁶⁸For more information on concerns that pimps were behind the occupation see Mathieu, 'Débat', 175; Zancarini-Fournel, 'Notre corps', 214-215 and Bernheim et al., *Mouvement*, 235.

soient contradictoires. En somme elles, elles voulaient exercer leur métier dans de bonnes conditions et nous, on voulait, même si on n'arrivait pas à le dire, la disparition de ce métier-là.

(What the women of Saint-Nizier wanted was not what we wanted. We didn't know exactly whether we should express our own opinions on prostitution, even if they were contradictory. Truth be told, they wanted to be able to practice their profession under good conditions while we, although we did not manage to say so, wanted to get rid of this profession).⁶⁹

For the prostitutes too, the relationship was also not always perfect. As occurred in Britain, some argued it was insulting for feminist women to constantly compare their lives to prostitutes'. For example, in her interview with *Les Pétroleuses*, Barbara complained that whenever you try to talk to women about prostitution, the first thing they say is 'Mais toutes les femmes sont prostituées, elles sont objet' (But all women are prostitutes, they are an object) and that no one was interested in the actual experiences of prostitutes.⁷⁰ Writing in 1977, Barbara also described another interview with *Les Pétroleuses*, where many of the prostitutes did not describe themselves as feminists, because they believed the movement did not represent them.⁷¹

However, unlike in Britain, despite these grievances, feminist support of the occupation was stronger. Alongside the actions of the Lyon feminists, for example, *La Ligue du droit des femmes*, led by de Beauvoir, affirmed 'sa solidarité totale avec le mouvement des prostituées en lutte à Lyon' (its total solidarity with the prostitute movement struggling in Lyon).⁷² In a tract published by a Lyon feminist group, they described the occupation as 'le symbole de la libération de toutes les femmes' (the symbol of the liberation of all women), universalising the campaign by connecting it to the broader place of women in society.⁷³ Whereas in Britain prostitutes complained that feminists were not offering any support when they should, in France the friction came precisely

⁶⁹Centre Lyonnais, *Chronique*, 66.

⁷⁰Anonymous, 'Ce n'est pas un sexe', *Les Pétroleuses*, 1977, 27 (Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris, 396 PET Bul).

⁷¹Ibid. See also Barbara, de Coninck, *La partagée*, 168.

⁷²Zancarini-Fournel, 'Notre corps', 214-215.

⁷³Anon, 'La Loi', 230.

because of feminist support. For example, some prostitutes saw feminists as having taken over the occupation, believing that their own experiences and testimonies were being ignored by the feminist conversation.⁷⁴

As Mathieu notes, feminist support was based on the idea that the logical position was to support an oppressed group against the state, especially when the former consisted of women.⁷⁵ Mathieu also points to the analyses of Luc Boltanski as relevant, noting that in order for a stigmatised and oppressed group like prostitutes to be validated or listened to, they had to connect their campaign to a broader political movement, in this case the women's liberation movement and *Le Nid*.⁷⁶ Unlike in Britain, the involvement of *Le Nid* and the MLF in the occupations provided practical and public support. Arguably, groups like *Cercle Flora Tristan*, *Cercle Elizabeth Dimitriev*, *Les Pétroleuses* or *La Ligue du droit des femmes* found it easier than the WLM to absorb the prostitute struggles into their broader class and anti-establishment politics, seeing it as a problem for the collective and not the individual.

L'affaire Barbara

Another significant event in the MLF, which will be briefly examined, is 'l'affaire Barbara'. Whereas in Britain prostitutes were usually discussed as an abstract concept by members of the WLM, in France one of the leaders of the occupation became embroiled in arguments within the movement. This led to schisms within MLF along familiar fault lines, ultimately pitting *Psych et Po* against others from the MLF.

As noted, 'Barbara' was one of the most-high profile advocates for the French prostitute cause. Following the occupation, she was offered a job by *Psych et Po* in a bookshop they were planning to open in Lyon. *Psych et Po* gave her the job, not only because she was from Lyon and a militant, but also, as Pavard argues, to give her a respectable job so she would no longer be a

⁷⁴Mathieu, *La mobilisation*, 27.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶See Luc Boltanski, 'La dénonciation publique', in *L'amour et la justice comme compétences: trois essais de sociologie de l'action* (Éditions Métailié, 1990).

prostitute.⁷⁷ Prostitution was not a topic that *Psych et Po* paid much attention to. In their periodical, for example, they covered the situation of prostitutes abroad, framing it as another example of sexual and gender inequality, but in general there was no strong discussion around prostitution within the organisation. As previously noted, the idea that 'women' as a group had a shared identity and experience across borders was a significant element of both women's liberation movements. This partially explains why *Psych et Po* hired Barbara, but it was perhaps a mistake. As Pavard notes 'Elles l'engagent sans la connaître vraiment, sur les bases d'une solidarité et d'une conviction commune de la nécessité de se libérer en tant que femmes' (they hired her without really knowing her, on the basis of a common solidarity and shared conviction of the need for women to liberate themselves).⁷⁸

The problem occurred in 1976 when Barbara revealed in an article in *Le Monde* that she had attempted suicide.⁷⁹ Barbara claimed *Psych et Po* had not paid her properly.⁸⁰ Although nominally a conflict between an employer and an employee, the situation escalated when women from other groups in the MLF got involved to support Barbara. *Psych et Po*, as a feminist organisation, were attempting to claim solidarity with all women, so for some, it was galling to see them turn around and treat a female worker so shoddily. For example, Picq stated in her 1993 memoir, that:

pour beaucoup de femmes du mouvement il n'est pas besoin d'en savoir davantage pour accorder leur sympathie et présumer la culpabilité [...] Le soutien à Barbara contre les éditions et Librairie des femmes lui est acquis à priori.

⁷⁷Bibia Pavard, *Les éditions des femmes: Histoire des premières années 1972–1979*

(L'Harmattan, 2005), 133. This section will only briefly examine the events. For a more detailed overview see Jennifer L. Sweatman, *The Risky Business of French Feminism: Publishing, Politics and Artistry* (Lexington Press, 2014), 106-115.

⁷⁸Pavard, *Les éditions*, 133.

⁷⁹'Une ancienne porte parole des prostituées a tenté de mettre fin à ses jours', *Le Monde*, July 29, 1976. See also 'Le recyclage d'une prostituée', *France-Soir*, July 29, 1976; 'Barbara raconte son échec avec des féministes', *Libération*, July 31, 1976, Martine Storti, 'Des femmes, des librairies, un monopole', *Libération*, October 19, 1976.

⁸⁰Pavard, *Les éditions*, 134. See also Françoise Picq, *Libération des femmes: les années - mouvement* (Éditions de Seuil, 1993), 250-251; Zancarini-Fournel, 'Notre corps', 214-215.

(For a lot of women in the movement, there was no need to know more in order to give their sympathy and presume guilt [...] The support for Barbara against the publisher and bookshop of *des femmes* was a priori).⁸¹

Their support was highlighted when Barbara and a group of feminists occupied the *des femmes* bookshop on the October 12, 1976 in order to obtain the money owed Barbara by *Psych et Po*.⁸² The situation would end up being resolved in multiple employment tribunals.⁸³ Unlike in Britain, this implied there was no shared feminist identity in the MLF, and some feminists were willing to 'side' with women from outside the movement.

It also shows how some in the MLF saw *Psych et Po* as 'establishment-like', perhaps due to the power they had from their bookshop and publishing company. For example, Picq and others framed their support as one of class and gender solidarity, supporting a woman oppressed by her employer. However, arguably this conflict resulted from the existing splits within the MLF. *Psych et Po* were often in confrontation with other feminists. Picq has herself spoken of her dislike of their tactics. For example, in an oral history interview, Picq said that *Psych et Po* were too 'stalinien' (Stalinist).⁸⁴ Picq and others wanted a more open debate on feminist issues, and as Picq herself noted in an oral history interview, 'on voulait pas être des perroquets' (we didn't want to be parrots).⁸⁵ *Psych et Po*, on the other hand: 'avait une seule parole [...] qui était celle d'Antoinette' (had only one truth [...] that of Antoinette [the leader of *Psych et Po*]).⁸⁶ Picq et al. were not only supporting Barbara because of her situation, but also because of whom she was arguing against. What happened to Barbara

⁸¹Picq, *Libération*, 250-251.

⁸²Pavard, *Les éditions*, 135.

⁸³See Picq, *Libération*, 250-251. For the views of *Psych et Po* see 'C'est un procès politique qu'on nous fait', *des femmes*, March 25, 1977.

⁸⁴Françoise Picq interviewed by Robert Gildea, 27/04/07. Part of the oral histories collected by Robert Gildea, James Mark and Annette Warring, eds., *Europe's 1968: Voices of Revolt* (Oxford University Press, 2013). Transcript can be accessed at <http://around1968.modhist.ox.ac.uk>.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid. See also Ringart, 'La naissance d'un secte', *Libération*, June 1, 1977, 16-17.

was seen as just another example of *Psych et Po's* rigid, insular, and exclusionary feminism.

Britain

Prostitution was, as has already been seen in relation to France, a fraught topic for second-wave feminists. The prostitute was the most explicit public demonstration of the sexual double standard; her very existence seemed to support the commodification of the female body and female sexuality by a patriarchal society. Yet the prostitute also had a degree of power and autonomy denied to other women. If sex equals power then, although the power for a man comes from his ability to 'buy' access to women, as Priscilla Alexander noted in a 1996 article, the prostitute's power 'consists of her ability to set the terms of her sexuality, and to demand substantial payment for her time and skills. Thus, prostitution is one area in which women have traditionally and openly viewed sex as power'.⁸⁷ The former view of prostitution received more credence within some WLM circles than the latter, as will be explored. The idea of women gaining power through their body became more popular with later waves of feminism. The following sections will examine prostitute activism and its relationship to the WLM, alongside the broader debates on prostitution within the movement.

Feminism, Prostitution and Sexuality

As with all aspects of sexuality, the politics of each current in the WLM shaped their approach to prostitution. Radical/revolutionary feminists were interested in discussing how prostitution oppressed all women, and how, as Maureen O'Hara argued in a 1983 paper, it formed part of 'the whole structure of male

⁸⁷Priscilla Alexander, 'Prostitution: A Difficult Issue for Feminists', in *Feminism and Sexuality: A Reader*, eds. Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott (Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 344.

aggression'.⁸⁸ On the other hand, as prostitution – like pornography – dealt with both male and female sexuality, some British socialist feminists often found it a problematic subject to discuss.

For radical/revolutionary feminists, existing theories led them to focus on prostitution as an institution and how it supported 'male supremacy' and perpetuated sexual inequality for all women. A significant proponent of this view was Sheila Jeffreys. For example, writing in 1981, Jeffreys argued that she wanted feminist discussion to move away from why women became prostitutes, to why men require prostitution, and that 'studying prostitutes to explain prostitution is as useful as examining the motives of factory workers to explain the existence of capitalism. We must ask who benefits and in whose interests the institution is maintained. Only examining the motives of the ruling class can tell us that'.⁸⁹ For Jeffreys, prostitution was another consequence of male sexual control of women, male sexuality was the bedrock of female oppression, and prostitution existed only as 'a guerilla training camp and rehabilitation centre for sexual terrorists'.⁹⁰ Such ideas also surfaced in the MLF, but the actions of *Les Pétoleuses* and others imply this did not limit feminist activism as strongly as in the WLM.

As in the MLF, WLM discussions on prostitution questioned whether a shared identity as women was enough to warrant feminist support of prostitutes. There was a stronger focus on ideals of female purity by the WLM. For example, writing in 1982, Rowbotham noted the 'categorisation of women in terms of sexuality has been a means of control by division'.⁹¹ This was perhaps

⁸⁸Maureen O'Hara, 'Prostitution – Towards a Feminist Analysis and Strategy', in *Women Against Violence Against Women*, eds. Dusty Rhodes and Sandra McNeill (Onlywomen Press, 1985), 72.

⁸⁹Sheila Jeffreys, 'Prostitution', *Revolutionary and Radical Feminist Newsletter*, Spring 1981, in Rhodes and McNeill, *Women Against*, 61. For arguments around the similarities between revolutionary feminists and moral purity campaigners see Margaret Hunt, 'The De-eroticization of Women's Liberation: Social Purity Movements and the Revolutionary Feminism of Sheila Jeffreys', *Feminist Review* 34 (1990): 23-46.

⁹⁰Jeffreys, 'Prostitution', 68. See also O'Hara, 'Prostitution', 73.

⁹¹Sheila Rowbotham, *The Past is Before Us: Feminism in Action since the 1960s* (Pandora Press, 1989), 261. See also Bridget Hutter and Gillian Williams, *Controlling Women: The Normal and the Deviant* (Croom Helm, 1981), 34.

a result of the actions of nineteenth-century feminists highlighted earlier, and the public reaction to a series of murders in Northern England. Coverage of the so-called 'Yorkshire Ripper' murders was criticised by some feminists, first for separating reportage on the victims into prostitutes and 'ordinary' women, and second for reserving more sympathy for the latter, a conversation not as widespread in the MLF, possibly because there were no equivalent high-profile murders with the same impact. In the same article, Jeffreys also pointed to this distinction as an example of male social control, stating that prostitution cleaved women from each other, splitting them into 'the pure and the fallen so that knowledge cannot be pooled'.⁹²

Yet, in comparison to France, this knowledge that women as a group had collective power had little practical result. As Hilary Kinnell notes, the Sutcliffe killings were 'useful for grandstanding their [radical feminists'] ideology of male violence and expounding on the problematic nature of male heterosexuality, but they do not appear to have participated in an alternative of political activism that gave sex-workers a role'.⁹³ Whereas the support of *Cercle Flora Tristan* and others was offered because it was the 'right' thing to do, the influence of radical feminist theory and the waning in strength of the movement, meant that the WLM for the most part remained locked into discussing prostitution in the context of sexuality and 'male supremacy', not economic oppression, police brutality or anti-establishment politics.⁹⁴ For example, Jeffreys argued in 1983, that the lack of support by feminists was because of an 'uneasiness at supporting prostitutes against victimisation in a way which offers no real threat to male power' and, she argued, prostitution 'raises uncomfortable questions about sexual relationships with men in general and all our past experiences of them'.⁹⁵ It meant that by the time the prostitute occupation occurred, there had been little in-depth discussion of the subject by the WLM.

⁹²Jeffreys, 'Prostitution' 61.

⁹³Hilary Kinnell, *Violence and Sex Work in Britain* (Routledge, 2013), 25.

⁹⁴There were some exceptions to this: See for example Denise Winn, 'For the love of Money', *Spare Rib*, No.2, August 1972, 13-15; Felicity Crowther, 'Prostitution and the Law', *Spare Rib*, No.34, April 1975, 30-31.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 59. See also, Victoria Green, 'We're not criminals – Prostitutes Organise', *Spare Rib*, No.56, March 1977, 17-18.

Prostitute Activism

In both Britain and France, it was in the 1970s that prostitutes' rights groups appeared, but the relationship between prostitutes and feminists differed by country. Unlike in France, there were more advocacy groups in Britain. There were three main groups campaigning on prostitution in this period: *The English Collective of Prostitutes* (ECP), *Prostitution Laws Are Nonsense* (PLAN) and *Prostitutes for the Reform of Solicitation* (PROS). ECP and PLAN had the closest links to the WLM, and it is the former group's church occupation that will be examined.⁹⁶

The ECP were formed in the early 1970s and were initially a fairly informal, disparate group. This changed in 1975 when they decided to publish a document called 'For Prostitutes and Against Prostitution', in response to the refusal of the London WLW to side with the founder of PLAN, who had been the only prostitute group publicly talking about the issue within feminist circles for a few years.⁹⁷ PROS was a group set up in Birmingham by a prostitute, a probation officer and a male solicitor, and, as its name suggests, it campaigned for changes to the laws on soliciting.⁹⁸ In contrast to the ECP and PROS, PLAN advocated on behalf of call girls and escorts, rather than street prostitutes, and was founded by Helen Buckingham, a call girl who had started publicly speaking out about prostitution in the early 1970s.⁹⁹ All the groups were fairly homogenous in their aims and view of prostitution. As in France, all three aimed to give a voice to prostitutes, and based their campaigns on their direct experiences, rather than discussing prostitution as an institution. For example, PROS were adamant that any campaigns around the issue of soliciting should be led by prostitutes themselves, arguing that 'the women themselves must do

⁹⁶For much of the 1970s/80s Selma James acted as their spokeswoman, despite not being a member of the ECP herself.

⁹⁷'Prostitution of justice' interview with Selma James by Claire, *The Leveller*, No.17, February 1983, 4.

⁹⁸Green, 'We're not criminals', 17.

⁹⁹'Prostitution Laws Are Nonsense' (Undated Pamphlet, Women's Library, London, 3AMS/B/16/05).

the talking or it's no good'.¹⁰⁰ Just as French prostitutes highlighted the pernicious impact of police action and the state, the aims of the British groups likewise converged around police brutality and state regulation, which they viewed as dangerous. Yet, legal differences led to some distinctions. For example, women from PROS talked about how the police constantly picked them up, or raided rooms where they were gathered for safety because they had been declared a 'common prostitute'.¹⁰¹

Like the French prostitutes, to detoxify the subject, the ECP discussed prostitution in an economic context, not male sexuality. They consistently drew comparisons with other forms of 'non-traditional' work done by women, and, as was the case with the French prostitute occupiers, wanted to break the links between a person's identity and their job. For example, they argued people that should not be defined by their work or how they earned their money, saying that they 'were against housework but that didn't mean that we were against housewives'.¹⁰² It implies that, like the prostitutes in Lyon, the ECP saw shared gender as the strongest bond for collective action. It perhaps explains why the group formed an alliance with WFH. Like the French prostitutes, the ECP saw the benefits of alliances with outside organisations, as they believed they would have a better chance of getting their message across if they worked with 'so-called respectable women'.¹⁰³ Throughout the latter half of the 1970s the ECP debated prostitution within feminist circles, going to workshops on various issues, not just prostitution. In addition, as occurred with the occupying prostitutes in France, the ECP were very keen to stress their connection to the women's movement and broader left-wing activism, framing their fight in feminist terms stating:

we want to make clear that we are part of the women's movement, part of the peace movement, and part of the

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 17.

¹⁰¹Ibid. See also Sheila Rowbotham, *The Past*, 261; Hutter and Williams, *Controlling Women*, 34.

¹⁰²English Collective of Prostitutes Newsletter 1983 (Uncatalogued, Feminist Archive North).

¹⁰³Ibid.

working-class movement, by the connections we make, both in ideas and organising.¹⁰⁴

As in France, this framing of prostitution allowed prostitutes to make wider connections to structural inequality.¹⁰⁵ For example, presenting a paper at a socialist feminist conference, Buckingham wrote:

Until women are taken into consideration in the evolution of social and political structures and in their own right rather than as appendages of men, the financial rewards to be gained by selling sexual services far outweigh any advantages that alternative life-styles present.¹⁰⁶

This was particularly strong in the ECP, due to their links with WFH. The ECP saw 'going on the game' as 'a fight against violence, the violence of poverty'.¹⁰⁷ How one earned the money was unimportant, what was important was the result, the freedoms that it gives you, both financial and social. For example, as the ECP wrote:

money makes choices possible, for example to walk out of an impossible marriage, to raise a child on our own if we want to, without being forced to be dependent on a man because he is the one with the bread. With money women can afford to be lesbians [...] Money makes possible better relationships with our children: we can say yes to them.¹⁰⁸

This quote reframed prostitution as an example of freedom for women, both financial and sexual: integral ideas of the WLM. It universalised the prostitute's experience, and gave a solid structural reason for their victimisation by society.

As Peter de Marneffe argues, the argument that the prostitute was punished and forced into her job by financial circumstances, differed from those

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Mary Gibson and Eveline Garston, 'Prostitution: A particular Kind of Job', *Women's Voice*, No.25, January 1979.

¹⁰⁶ Helen Buckingham, 'Sexual self-determination', Late-1970s conference paper, quoted in Rowbotham, *The Past*, 209.

¹⁰⁷ English Collective Newsletter, Feb 1983.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from The English Collective of Prostitutes to *Time Out*, June 24-30, 1977, 8.

who saw prostitution as a victimless crime.¹⁰⁹ This should have been an easier argument for feminists to support, as it disconnected prostitution from sexuality, while reminding feminists of the significance of female collective unity and solidarity.¹¹⁰ Yet this was not the case in practice. As in France the lack of direct experience of prostitution of the majority of feminists also contributed to a problematic relationship between prostitutes and feminists. For example, Buckingham claimed only the WFH gave support to prostitute activism, asserting that the rest of the WLM was disinterested.¹¹¹ Writing in 1979 Amanda Sebestyen noted that many feminists were against supporting prostitutes, seeing them as women 'crossing a women's picket line, breaking our ranks by "selling themselves"'.¹¹² Sebestyen called for more solidarity between the two groups, arguing that both 'pay the price of our [women's] subordination to men'.¹¹³ In her 1973 book *The Prostitution Papers*, for example, American feminist Kate Millett described a conference on prostitution she organised in 1971, and the confrontation that occurred when prostitutes attending the conference took offence at the nature of the discussions. For them it was presumptuous of non-prostitute women to think they could debate the issue without direct experience, and, as Millett notes, 'it is futile, as well as pompous to play missionary'.¹¹⁴ As Barbara had noted in France, some British prostitutes were unhappy with the term prostitute being used as a slur. For example, PROS wrote they wanted 'women's liberation to think about the whole thing and discuss it, but not just use it. They [the WLM] have used the word "prostitute" in a really nasty way – about housewives to sum up their idea of the exploited situation of women'.¹¹⁵

Writing in 1989 Rowbotham described how shocking and liberating it was for her to hear discussions on the ideas of bodily and sexual autonomy, as it

¹⁰⁹Peter de Marneffe, *Liberalism and Prostitution* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.

¹¹⁰See for example, Jeffreys, 'Prostitution', 64.

¹¹¹Helen Buckingham, 'Sexual self-determination'.

¹¹²Amanda Sebestyen, 'The Rules of the Game', *Spare Rib*, No.82, May 1979, 22-23.

¹¹³*Ibid.*

¹¹⁴Millett, *Prostitution Papers*, 5.

¹¹⁵Green, 'We're not criminals' 17.

contradicted the majority view of women's bodies.¹¹⁶ What Rowbotham did not acknowledge, however, were the limits of British feminist ideas on female bodily autonomy and sexual agency. As argued in Chapter Four, there was often a strong strand of feminist moralism in each movement. Writing in 1980, Tricia Dearden noted how, in her view, the WLM had a tendency to form 'an exclusive kind of club, with a moralistic emphasis on what women should be doing to get out of their situation'.¹¹⁷ This can be seen in the British feminist approach to prostitution. As noted previously, there were qualms by some French feminists on the subject, but this did not prevent a wide range of groups supporting the Lyon occupation. In the WLM, like pornography, the problem was that in not engaging with and supporting prostitutes, feminists were implying that an individual's choice and sexual or bodily autonomy were irrelevant within a broader oppressive institution (such as prostitution). For many in the WLM, as will be seen, prostitution was an issue that could be campaigned on by prostitutes themselves, but should not receive the backing of the movement as a whole.

The Occupation

As Kurbanoglu notes, as in France, British prostitutes began to feel they had exhausted every available 'repertoire of action', and direct action was needed.¹¹⁸ The most high-profile example was the ECP church occupation. On November 17, 1982, a group from the ECP walked into the Church of the Holy Cross in the King's Cross area of London. The occupation lasted twelve days, and like in the Lyon occupation, councils and deputies came to listen to their demands, and they received support from various MPs such as Tony Benn and organisations, for example the Camden's Women's and Police Committees.¹¹⁹ Their immediate demands were met, including meetings with the police and council deputies and the promise of the placement of individuals in housing and

¹¹⁶Rowbotham, *The Past*, 87-93; See also Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, *Abortion and Women's Choice: The State, Sexuality and Reproductive Freedom* (Longman, 1984).

¹¹⁷Tricia Dearden, 'Prostitution', *The Leveller*, No.31, April 1980.

¹¹⁸Kurbanoglu, 'What makes', 163.

¹¹⁹James, 'Hookers', 118; Kurbanoglu, 'What makes', 167; Sue O'Sullivan, 'Women Cross at King's X Cops', *Spare Rib*, No.128, March 1983, 11.

social services to help prostitutes who had been discriminated against and who wanted to get away from prostitution.

The British activists had been influenced by the Lyon occupation of prostitutes in 1975.¹²⁰ Their demands were:

1. An end to illegal arrests of prostitutes
2. An end to police threats, blackmail, harassment and racism
3. Hands off our children – we don't want our children in care
4. An end to arrests of boyfriends, husbands, sons¹²¹
5. Arrest rapists and pimps instead
6. Immediate protection, welfare, housing for women who want to get off the game.¹²²

As Roberts notes, these can be divided into 'material and non-material demands'.¹²³ They were all grievances that had troubled prostitutes for a long time, and were similar to many of the demands of the French prostitutes. As Roberts and Kurbanolgu have argued, the strikes and occupations by prostitutes in both countries were a result of post-war economic conditions and unsuccessful attempts at the prohibition of prostitution.¹²⁴ While both occupations presented their campaign as an example of left-wing radicalism, there were some differences in the language of their demands. Unlike in France, where prostitutes couched their demands in the language of the republic, the ECP asked for changes in behaviour from the police and establishment, not a reconfiguration of the place of prostitution in society.

Like those who occupied the Lyon church, the ECP frequently presented themselves as mothers above all. Their first action was to place a banner outside the church that stated 'Mothers need Money. End Police Illegality and

¹²⁰James, 'Hookers', 119.

¹²¹Any man who lived with a 'known prostitute' or lived off the earnings of prostitutes could be arrested.

¹²²The English Collective of Prostitutes Pamphlet, 1982 (Uncatalogued, Feminist Archive North). See also James, 'Hookers', 113; English Collective Newsletter, Feb 1983.

¹²³Roberts, *Whores*, 344.

¹²⁴Roberts, *Whores*, 282; Kurbanoglu, 'What makes', 172.

Racism in King's Cross'.¹²⁵ In a 1980 survey the ECP found that over 70 percent of prostitutes were mothers, and many ECP members discussed the difficulties they faced as single-mothers.¹²⁶ Many of these framed their work as another example of demeaning low-paid labour that exploited women, and how they undertook it to provide for their children. For example, Anita described her experience: 'The work was horrible, horrible, horrible [...] the lowest form of prostitution. But then again, I had that money; I stuck it in the bank, and I felt great'.¹²⁷ Such testimonies supported the ECP's central argument: sex workers were working in exploitative jobs to feed their children, and therefore should be protected the same as any unionised workforce. It perhaps made their demands more persuasive. As Kurbanoglu notes, 'embedding their concrete grievances within the emotion-laden "package" or "frame" of motherhood may have convinced participants that their cause [was] just and important'.¹²⁸ Feminists in both countries were trying to move away from stereotypes of women as hyper-sexualised or inherently maternal. This perhaps contributed to the reluctance some in each movement felt about getting involved with the prostitutes' campaigns, as they were seen to be propagating a representation of women feminists often rejected.

The choice of a church for the place of occupation has also received some scrutiny, and was chosen for similar practical reasons as in the French case. Arguably, there were also symbolic reasons behind the decision. Although in Britain there was no equivalent connection to religious organisations as between *Le Nid* and the prostitutes in France, the symbolism of prostitutes occupying a religious building cannot be denied. It meant the ECP were deliberately leaning on Christian ideas around propriety, charity, and forgiveness. For example, in letters recalling the occupation, the minister of the church, Father Trevor Richardson, seems to have been aware of the delicate balancing act he had to manage, saying:

¹²⁵English Collective of Prostitutes, 'Campaigning for Legal Change', in *Rethinking Prostitution: Purchasing Sex in the 1990s*, eds. Graham Scambler and Annette Scambler (Routledge, 1997), 87. See also James, 'Hookers', 113.

¹²⁶Roberts, *Whores*, 328.

¹²⁷Cited in Roberts, *Whores*, 313.

¹²⁸Kurbanoglu, 'What makes', 171.

on the one hand I agreed with much of what the ECP were saying but if I appeared to be totally on their side I would have the local community up in arms. If, however, I gave into residents' demands to have the women forcibly ejected, I should seem to have no Christian sympathy with the prostitutes themselves and no concern for the justice of the kingdom of God.¹²⁹

As a result of pressure from the congregation, Richardson's opinion hardened, turning against the ECP and disparaging them in the press, saying as 'Christians' it was their duty to keep their distance from the occupation.¹³⁰ It perhaps meant that the ECP were unable to highlight the support of religious organisations for the occupation, as occurred in through the work of *Le Nid*, which potentially isolated the ECP.

Much of the coverage from the press focused on the juxtaposition of prostitutes occupying a religious building, with some newspapers making innuendos around 'tarts and vicars parties'.¹³¹ As James noted in her 1983 memoir of the strike, much of the reaction from the press was mocking in tone.¹³² For example, in an article on the occupation *The Spectator* described the strikers as a 'bevy of masked chain smoking harridans' unsupported by other prostitutes, but also argued that they were not in fact 'real' prostitutes.¹³³ The author described those occupying the church as 'middle-class radical feminists attached to the Women's Centre in Tonbridge Street under whose umbrella nestle such supporting groups as Women Against Rape and Black Women for Wages for Housework'.¹³⁴ This was a point made by others. Richardson, for example, claimed that the ECP, or at least those occupying the church, were not the 'ordinary girls who work round the square' but rather 'a highly politicised group of radical feminists, for whom feminism is a platform for

¹²⁹Father Trevor Richardson to the Wellclose Square Fund, March 1983 (The Women's Library, London, 3AMS/B/16/05,).

¹³⁰The English Collective Pamphlet, 1982.

¹³¹Gavin Stamp, 'The Ladies of King's Cross', *The Spectator*, November 27, 1982, 15.

¹³²James, 'Hookers', 16.

¹³³Stamp, 'The Ladies', 17.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*

their own brand of Marxism and revolution'.¹³⁵ In correspondence between Richardson and a Mrs. Ansell of the *Association for Moral and Social Hygiene* – an abolitionist organisation also known as *The Josephine Butler Society* – Ansell tells Richardson how his letter showed her 'what it must be like to be at the receiving end of Selma James' activities', to which Richardson responded:

what staggers me is that this tiny and totally unrepresentative group of women should have any credibility whatsoever and that they should be able to exert such disproportionate influence politically [...] it is vitally important that they should be exposed for the manipulative and mendacious extremists that they are.¹³⁶

Unlike *Le Nid* in France, the WFH had no history of activism around prostitution, or experience of advocating within institutions to fall back on, and the dominant perception of them as extremely radical perhaps influenced the way Richardson or *The Spectator* article's author saw the occupation, limiting their impact.

Richardson's was a view echoed by many within the WLM. For example, in an oral history interview, the self-identified revolutionary feminist Sandra McNeill connected the strike to WFH and was dismissive of what they were trying to achieve, describing the ECP as a 'weird Marxist group [...] for them prostituted women were at the forefront of the revolution, because they were paid for it, so they'd always supported it'.¹³⁷ Writing in 1983 Sue O'Sullivan complained that 'the whole attitude of the Wages for Housework backed ECP suggests a belief that prostitution as a political issue *belongs* to them'.¹³⁸ Much like the lack of WLM support for prostitutes before the occupation, the ECP complained that feminist groups refused to see prostitution as anything other than an oppressive institution. Like the French prostitute occupiers, the ECP saw their campaign as taking on the establishment. For example, they wrote, 'you can't be neutral when a whole group of women confront the State in that direct way. If you're not with the people at the time, then you're not with the

¹³⁵ Richardson to the Wellclose Square Trust.

¹³⁶ Correspondence between Mrs. Ansell and Father Trevor Richardson March 5, 1983 and March 16, 1983 (The Women's Library, London, 3AMS/B/16/05).

¹³⁷ Sandra McNeill Interviewed by Anna Gurun, 17/05/12, 23.

¹³⁸ O'Sullivan, 'Women Cross', 11.

people'.¹³⁹ They complained that their occupation was not helped by the considerable power of the women's movement, stating they were not 'well served by the women's media or the left-wing press – we were very much in the hands of the Establishment papers.'¹⁴⁰ The ECP wanted their occupation to be placed in a narrative of solidarity against the state, but unlike *Les Pétroleuses* and *Cercle Flora Tristan*, the majority of the WLM found this problematic. This was perhaps a result of the time the occupation took place – when the WLM was fragmented and waning – but the broader reluctance by the WLM to engage with prostitution alluded to earlier was also significant. As with pornography the theoretical clarity offered by radical feminists, and discomfort felt by socialist feminists on issues dealing with men meant the subject remained on the sidelines.

Conclusion

Although a thorny subject for feminists, it is clear that prostitute activism in the 1970s/80s was connected to feminist ideas, as many of their arguments of bodily autonomy were similar, just not articulated as strongly by the women's movements. In both countries, prostitutes saw themselves as part of the wave of left-wing activism of this period, which perhaps explains the similarities in ideas and campaigns. Both the WLM and MLF debated whether feminists should feel a sense of solidarity with prostitutes; similarities between prostitution and other forms of male oppression; and whether prostitution itself could be fought without hurting individual women. Despite this, in France, the high number of groups in the MLF and publicity about the occupation led to feminist support from groups like *Cercle Flora Tristan* and *Les Pétroleuses*, while in Britain, prostitutes often felt overlooked and unsupported by most of the WLM. These groups, at least, were more prepared to discuss a variety of female experiences than their British counterparts, and happier to discuss prostitution in the context of economic oppression and confronting the state, not male sexuality. Like pornography, it highlights the uneasiness some in the WLM felt when it came male sexuality, and the limits to the forms of sexual agency and

¹³⁹'Prostitution of justice' by Claire.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

collective action that could be supported by feminists. As with other aspects of sexuality, it shows that despite similar ideas about prostitution, there were differences in action as result of contrasting cultural and social contexts.

Chapter Six: Rape

Of all the topics examined in this thesis, rape was the one with the most problematic connection to sexuality. British and French feminists were both influenced by theories from the United States, which reclassified rape as a crime of violence and not sex. Both also rejected previous assumptions of rape as an irrational act by an individual, arguing instead that it was connected to broader social and structural contexts. There were consequently parallels in much of the feminist discussion in each country. Those that will be examined include: the impact of male power and fear of rape on women, consent, and the need to reclaim public spaces through protest and personal testimonies. However, despite these similarities, there were differences in feminist activism. In France, legal trials played a significant role, as feminists used the courts to push for social change; and there were heated debates with male progressives over the limits of 'sexual liberation', racism, and gender. In Britain, the WLM created organisations like the Rape Crisis Centres (RCC) to provide support for rape victims, and engaged in more direct action. This chapter will accordingly compare these elements, and explore the extent to which British and French second-wave feminists had a similar approach to rape.

Legislative and Judicial History of Rape in Britain and France

As with prostitution and abortion, the debate about rape can be divided into two parts: the legal definition, and cultural assumptions. In both countries, feminists realised that altering the law was insufficient; changing how rape was discussed by society was equally important. This meant examining how women's

behaviour and sexuality was controlled, and the pernicious impact that 'rape culture'¹ could have on all women.

In England, Wales and Scotland, rape was defined as sexual intercourse without her consent where the woman was not the man's wife, and was classed as a sex-law. Sexual intercourse was defined only as penile penetration of the vagina.² Under English and Scottish common law, the actions of the victim were also relevant, as the victim had to prove she had shown physical resistance, an idea feminists would campaign against. Marital rape was even thornier since, by law, a woman's consent was seen to be continuous within a marriage.³ In England, The Sexual Offences Act 1956 also made it illegal for a man to have sexual intercourse with a woman by impersonating her husband.⁴ Indecent assault was also defined by the 1956 Act and covered any sexual assault that did not involve penile penetration of the vagina, including: penetration of the vagina with an object, forced oral intercourse, and any sexual touching without consent.⁵ As will be explored later in the chapter, many feminists disagreed with

¹First coined by American second-wave feminists, 'rape culture' described a culture where rape and sexual violence are pervasive and normalised as a result of ideas around sexuality and gender.

²There were differences in how Scottish and English common law regulated sodomy, with the latter covering sodomy of a man or woman under laws on indecent assault.

³Some feminists from the nineteenth-century onwards had criticised marital or conjugal rape. In 1984 the Criminal Law Revision Committee issued a report rejecting calls for the offense of rape to be applied to marital relations in England and Wales, and the exemption was not abolished until 1991. The exemption was abolished in Scotland in 1989.

⁴(1) It is a felony for a man to rape a woman.

(2) A man who induces a married woman to have sexual intercourse with him by impersonating her husband commits rape

Meaning of "sexual intercourse"

Where, on the trial of any offence under this Act, it is necessary to prove sexual intercourse (whether natural or unnatural), it shall not be necessary to prove the completion of the intercourse by the emission of seed, but the intercourse shall be deemed complete upon proof of penetration only'.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/4-5/69/part/II/crossheading/intercourse-by-force-intimidation-etc/enacted>

Accessed December 13, 2015.

⁵ Indecent assault on a woman

the distinction between indecent assault and rape. Following feminist campaigning, The Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act was passed in 1976, which defined rape as a statutory offence, in addition to providing restrictions on evidence at rape trials and the anonymity of rape victims.⁶ As with abortion, this was not the exact law many feminists wanted, which contributed to the problematic relationship the WLM had with the law.

In France, under La Code Pénal de 1810, 'l'attentat violent à la pudeur' (rape and violent indecent assault) were classed together and punished similarly. As in Britain, the victim had to demonstrate they had been physically assaulted, there was no exemption for marital rape, and it was classed as a sex-crime.⁷ The law was redefined in 1832, when indecent assault and rape were separated.⁸ As the Code also covered the age of consent for minors it was

'(1) It is an offence, subject to the exception mentioned in subsection (3) of this section, for a person to make an indecent assault on a woman.

(2) A girl under the age of sixteen cannot in law give any consent, which would prevent an act being an assault for the purposes of this section.

(3) Where a marriage is invalid under section two of the Marriage Act, 1949, or section one of the Age of Marriage Act, 1929 (the wife being a girl under the age of sixteen), the invalidity does not make the husband guilty of any offence under this section by reason of her incapacity to consent while under that age, if he believes her to be his wife and has reasonable cause for the belief'.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/4-5/69/section/14/enacted>

Accessed December 13, 2015.

⁶Meaning of 'rape' etc.

'(1) For the purposes of section 1 of the Sexual Offences Act 1956 (which relates to rape) a man commits rape if--

(a) he has unlawful sexual intercourse with a woman who at the time of the intercourse does not consent to it

(b) at that time he knows that she does not consent to the intercourse or he is reckless as to whether she consents to it; and references to rape in other enactments (including the following provisions of this Act) shall be construed accordingly'.

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/4-5/69/part/I/crossheading/interpretation

Accessed December 13, 2015.

⁷Although a man was prosecuted for marital rape in 1990, it was not until 1994 that it was criminalised in law.

⁸Article 331 de l'Ancien code pénal

discussed by other progressive thinkers interested in sexual mores, including Foucault and Hocquenghem.⁹

By the 1970s it was the 1832 Code that was still in force and campaigned on by the movement. As Picq noted in 1993, the MLF wanted to reform a law that 'avait pour but de protéger non pas la "femme" dans sa dignité, mais les "familles", atteintes dans leur honneur et dans leurs biens' (aimed not at protecting the dignity of the woman, but rather the families whose honour and property had been injured).¹⁰ The problem was that, although considered a crime, there was no clear definition of what constituted rape.¹¹ In practice this meant it was up to individual judges to define the crime, and as a

'Tout *attentat à la pudeur* commis ou tenté sans violence ni contrainte ni surprise sur la personne d'un mineur de quinze ans sera puni d'un emprisonnement de trois ans à cinq ans et d'une amende de 6 000 F à 60 000 F ou de l'une de ces deux peines seulement'.

(Any indecent assault committed or attempted without violence or coercion or surprise on a minor, under fifteen years of age shall be punished with imprisonment of three years to five years and a fine of 6000 to 60,000 F or one of these two penalties).

Article 333 de l'Ancien code pénal

'Tout autre *attentat à la pudeur* commis ou tenté avec violence, contrainte ou surprise sur une personne autre qu'un mineur de quinze ans sera puni d'un emprisonnement de trois ans à cinq ans et d'une amende de 6 000 F à 60 000 F ou de l'une de ces deux peines seulement'.

(Any other indecent assault committed or attempted with violence, constraint or surprise on a person other than a minor under fifteen years of age shall be punished with imprisonment for three years to five years and a fine of 6000 to 60 000 F or one of these penalties).

<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCode.do?idArticle=LEGIARTI000006490127&idSectionTA=LEGISCTA000006166089&cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006071029&dateTexte=19940228>

Accessed December 13, 2015.

⁹See, for example, 'La Loi de la pudeur', a radio discussion between Michel Foucault, Jean Danet and Guy Hocquenghem on the age of consent in France. A transcript can be seen in Michel Foucault, *Dit et écrits 1954–1984, 1980–1988* (Éditions Gallimard, 1994).

¹⁰Françoise Picq, *Libération des femmes: quarante ans de mouvement* (Éditions Dialogues, 2011), 306.

¹¹It only stated: 'Que quiconque aura commis le crime de viol sera puni de réclusion criminelle de 10 à 20 ans' (Anyone who commits the crime of rape will be punishable by imprisonment of 10-20 years).

result there were very few convictions.¹² This lack of a comprehensive definition of rape meant just as with abortion, the role of 'test trials' held more importance for French feminist campaigns than in Britain, as will be explored. Following the 'Aix Trial' in 1978, a new law was debated and passed in 1980.¹³ Unlike British law, it defined rape as forced sexual penetration and not intercourse, and so covered penile penetration of the mouth, anus and vagina and non-penile penetration of the vagina or anus. In addition, the description of sexual penetration also meant acts that could be considered 'non-sexual', such as the insertion of a finger or object into the anus, were not classed as rape and were instead covered under laws governing indecent assault.

Britain

Feminist Approaches to Rape

As noted, both movements were influenced by theories from the American WLM, which may explain why the feminist analysis in each country was often similar. One of the most significant writers on rape was American feminist Susan Brownmiller. In her 1975 book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, Brownmiller argued that rape was 'not a crime of lust, but of violence and power', and 'a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear'.¹⁴ For Brownmiller, just as African-Americans in the

¹²For figures on rape reports and convictions see Nathalie Bajos, Michel Bozon and l'équipe CSF, 'Les violences sexuelles en France: quand la parole se libère', *Population et société* 445 (2008). <https://www.ined.fr/fr/publications/population-et-societes/les-violences-sexuelles-en-france-quand-la-parole-se-libere/>

Accessed December 13, 2015

¹³Article 332:

'Tout acte de pénétration sexuelle, de quelque nature qu'il soit, commis sur la personne d'autrui, par violence, contrainte ou surprise, constitue un viol' (All acts of sexual penetration, of any nature, committed on another person by violence or surprise constitutes rape).

¹⁴Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (Ballantine Books, 1993 edition), 15.

Southern United States were kept in a state of fear and oppression by relatively few lynchings, all women were kept fearful by the threat of rape. The threat of rape as a form of social control, and a crime of male violence, became central tenets of feminist activism in both Britain and France. As Joanna Bourke notes, second-wave feminist theorising on rape was truly revolutionary, highlighting that 'women – the social group predominately at risk of being raped – successfully demanded that their narratives of sexual violation take precedence over those of the perpetrators'.¹⁵

Setch points to a fluidity of exchange in theoretical discussions on rape between socialist and radical feminists, compared to other issues, in the WLM.¹⁶ Although there was often a blurring between how each current viewed sexual violence, arguably this did not necessarily result in less sectarianism. As noted, feminists in both countries rejected the individualism of previous approaches to rape. The significant distinction between socialist and radical/revolutionary feminists was that the former generally employed a materialist analysis, the latter essentialist. As writers such as Browne, and Lovenduski and Randall have noted, British socialist feminists emphasised the impact of capitalism, arguing that rape was a product of male frustration about lack of control over their own lives within a capitalist system.¹⁷ For example, in an article in *Red Rag*, calling for the 'Seventh Demand', the authors argued that the majority of society was against rape and women battering – to varying degrees – unlike abortion, for example. Consequently, for the Seventh Demand to be significant, it had to provide a feminist analysis. For them, rape and male violence were 'a result of social structures rather than of the behaviour of

¹⁵ Joanna Bourke, *Rape: A History from 1860 to the Present Day* (Virago Press, 2007), 140.

¹⁶ Eve Grace Setch, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Britain, 1969–79: Organisation, Creativity and Debate* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London 2000), 101.

¹⁷ Joni Lovenduski and Vicky Randall, *Contemporary Feminist Politics: Women and Power in Britain* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 320; Sarah F. Browne, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Scotland c.1968–c.1979* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Dundee, 2009), 241.

deviant individuals, or the biological characteristics of either sex'.¹⁸ Like the socialist feminist approach to pornography, this perhaps avoided a deeper analysis of individual male-female relationships, or male sexuality, as these were viewed as too problematic to approach.

Conversely, radical feminists saw rape as a product of gender relations in a patriarchal society. This analysis placed rape as the most extreme end of a continuum of male domination of women, and rejected a materialist analysis of rape.¹⁹ For example, in a *Scarlet Woman* 1979 article, Sue Rodmell argued that the latter approach denied the power of individual men over individual women and stated: 'The ideology of blaming the system provides an escape route from responsibility for men'.²⁰ Some British revolutionary feminists also rejected disconnecting rape from sex completely. For example, writing in 1980, Sandra McNeill argued that defining rape as a crime of violence, erases 'sexual control, the form of control men only use against women', and that 'rape – for men – is just one form of sexual intercourse'.²¹ This was not widespread within the movement as whole, however. Instead, unlike in the MLF, the radical/revolutionary feminist analysis of rape as a crime of violence and social control was more influential on the WLM. As Rees notes, it was revolutionary feminist ideology that provided a theoretical clarity around rape and 'male

¹⁸Ellen Malos and Frankie Rickford, 'A Seventh Demand', *Red Rag*, No.13, 1977, 11. See also 'Important Issues – Rape', *Spare Rib*, No.58, May 1977, 8.

¹⁹See for example, Sheila Jeffreys, 'Male Sexuality as Social Control', Edinburgh (1977) cited in Jeska Rees, 'A Look Back at Anger: The Women's Liberation Movement in 1978', *Women's History Review* 19:3 (2010): 343; London Rape Action Group, 'Towards a Revolutionary Feminist Analysis of Rape' (1978), reprinted in *Women Against Violence Against Women*, eds. Dusty Rhodes and Sandra McNeill, (Onlywomen Press, 1985), 25.

²⁰Sue Rodmell, 'Blaming the System', *Scarlet Woman*, No.10, December 1979, reprinted in Rhodes and McNeill, *Women Against*, 29-31. See also Angela Phillips, 'Rape', *Spare Rib*, No.20, February 1974, 45. where Phillips argues that only 'a relationship which is not built out of dominance and submission' between men and women will combat rape.

²¹Sandra McNeill, 'Rape, Sexuality and Crimes of Violence, 1980, in McNeill and Rhodes, *Women Against*, 115-116. See also Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 134.

supremacy'.²² Browne supports this, noting that socialist feminist analysis of the relations of production 'never resonated with women's liberation activists in quite the same way as the theories about the patriarchy', as will be explored in the following section.²³

All Men Are Potential Rapists': Male Violence and Social Control

Writing in 1987, the historian Anne Edwards argues that, in England in the 1970s, no significant body of feminist work on male violence comparable to those in America was produced, works by Erin Pizzey aside.²⁴ Rather, Edwards states, it was not until the 1980s, when many in the WLM began to question whether the movement itself was in decline, that there was more theorising on the subject. Setch argues against this, correctly noting that although there were no major published works written on the issue, amongst feminist groups across the country in the 1970s there were debates on male violence, and satellite groups founded to counter the dominant cultural narratives of rape and women.²⁵

As Browne notes: 'many feminists believed the fear of rape was more debilitating than the actual event, restricting women's freedom'.²⁶ Building on Brownmiller's argument, feminists in both movements discussed how women's behaviour in public spaces was affected by this threat. For example, in a 1978 paper, the revolutionary feminist London Rape Action Group (LRAC) described

²²Jeska Rees, *All the Rage: Revolutionary Feminism in England, 1977–1983* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Western Australia, 2007), 155. See also Lynne Segal, *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism* (Virago Press, 1987), 102 where Segal argued that revolutionary feminist theory around rape and violence was the most influential beyond feminist circles.

²³Browne, *Women's Liberation*, 241.

²⁴Anne Edwards, 'Male Violence in Feminist Theory: An Analysis of the Changing Conceptions of Sex/Gender Violence and Male Domination', in *Women, Violence and Social Control*, eds. Jalna Hanmer and Mary Maynard (Atlantic Highlands, 1987), 21. Erin Pizzey founded *Women's Aid* battered women refuges in 1971. She received intense criticism from many radical feminists over her claim that the majority of domestic violence was reciprocal. Significant examples of her work include *Scream Quietly or The Neighbours Will Hear* (Pelican, 1979); Erin Pizzey and Jeff Shapiro, *Prone to Violence* (Hamlyn, 1982).

²⁵Setch, *Women's Liberation*, 193.

²⁶Browne, *Women's Liberation*, 242.

the fear of rape as detrimental to all women, whether rape victims or not, arguing: '[t]he fear of rape is always with us. It affects our lives in countless ways – not only in that we are afraid to walk the streets late at night, but in all our dealings with men, however superficial these may be'.²⁷

An influential voice on rape and violence in the WLM was the revolutionary feminist Jalna Hanmer, whose 1977 paper 'Violence and the social control of women' made similar points to Brownmiller. Hanmer argued that fear of male violence was subtle, diffuse and existed on multiple levels: from a fear of how to behave to avoid mockery, to a knowledge that certain public areas or spaces were unsafe 'no-woman's lands' that should be avoided.²⁸ As noted previously, feminist theory from Wittig and others often crossed between the two movements, more than direct contact. Hanmer's work was one of the few examples of British feminist theory that attracted attention from some French feminists. For example, her work was translated and published in the periodical *Questions Féministes* in 1977. Arguably Hanmer's work was influential, because, like Brownmiller before her, she was one of the first to describe experiences shared by many women about their feelings in public spaces that had previously received little political or public attention, providing a theoretical framework for future activism to reclaim public spaces.

Similar to discussions on pornography, in both the WLM and MLF this relationship between women and public spaces was a significant part of feminist debates and campaigns on rape. Speaking out about your personal experiences was both empowering and taboo-busting. As in France, the WLM discussed their feelings of insecurity while walking alone, and there were often articles containing personal testimonies from women. For example, in a 1977

²⁷London Rape Action Group, 'Towards', 25. See also Zadie, Jalna, Marlene and Sandra, *Male Violence as Social Control* (Undated Pamphlet, Women's Liberation Movement, The Women's Library London, 7LIM/03); Anonymous, 'Why I'm a Revolutionary Feminist', *Revolutionary and Radical Feminist Newsletter*, Summer 1981; Hilary Wilce, 'Things that go Flash in the Night', *Spare Rib*, No.10, April 1973, 31; Zoe Fairbairns speaking at 'The UK Women's Liberation Movement Scottish Women's Liberation Movement Workshop' (9/05/09), University of Edinburgh, 42. Transcript available at The Women's Library, Glasgow, uncatalogued.

²⁸Jalna Hanmer, 'Violence and the Social Control of Women', in *Power and the State*, eds. Gary Littlejohn et al. (Croom Helm, 1978), 217-238; Jalna Hanmer, 'Male Violence and the Social Control of Women', *Catcall*, No.9, March 1979, 21-26.

Spare Rib article, the author discussed why women were afraid to walk alone at night and how the threat of rape impacted on their behavior in public spaces.²⁹ One testimonial described the verbal harassment a woman received whilst walking near Euston station alone at night and, echoing Hanmer's argument, described Euston as 'the domain of men only', and how she felt weak and unprotected: 'The skirt felt stupidly sloppy and unsubstantial – I needed boots, mail on my fists, and a weapon in my bag, not leaflets'.³⁰ Consequently, the best way to combat this was to take responsibility for your own safety on a day-to-day level so you could step outside of your identity as the 'weaker sex', and feel 'less hedged in by fear, more self-confident, and be able to change things'.³¹ Like in French feminist discussions, this connected the actions of an individual to a broader collective challenge to 'rape culture'.

Writing in 1989, the American radical feminist Catharine A. MacKinnon wrote that sexuality was a 'social construct of male power' and that 'male and female are created through the erotization of dominance and submission. The man/woman difference and the dominance/submission dynamic define each other'.³² Like with pornography, this latter dynamic shaped the radical/revolutionary feminist connection of sexual violence and wider gender relations. For example, as in France, in a 1977 report, London Rape Crisis Centre described rape as 'the logical and extreme end of the spectrum of male/female relationships'.³³ In this argument, male violence permeated a wide spectrum of gender relations, from 'the cheer up darling calls to violate our

²⁹ Alison Fell, Victoria Green and Rozsika Parker 'Defending Ourselves', *Spare Rib*, No.55, February 1977, reprinted in *Spare Rib Reader*, ed. Marsha Rowe (Penguin Books, 1982), 468-483.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid. See also Elsie Sharples, 'In Defence of Women's Self Defence', in *Feminist Action*, ed. Joy Holland (Battle Axe Books, 1981), 40-42; Stephanie Gilbert, 'Spare Parts', *Spare Rib*, No.16, October 1973. For a more detailed overview of feminist discussions on the efficacy of learning self-defence see Setch, *Women's Liberation*, 200-202.

³² MacKinnon, *Toward*, 113.

³³ London Rape Crisis Centre, 'First Report', March, 1977, reprinted in *No Turning Back: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement, 1975-80* eds. Feminist Anthology Collective (The Women's Press, 1981), 210. See also *The Revolutionary/Radical Feminist Newsletter*, No. 2, March 1979, 21.

private trains of thought, upwards'.³⁴ In a 1978 paper in the periodical *Feminists Against Sexual Terrorism* (F.A.S.T), the radical feminist London Rape Action Group described all the ways that male attention was imposed upon women, from forced intercourse to women being called frigid, or feeling guilty for not letting a man buy them a drink.³⁵ For both movements, this was an original approach, as it showed women how all aspects of male-female relationships occurred in a broader context of male domination. It perhaps gave voice to the spectrum of oppression that women operated under, which previous conversations on rape had failed to acknowledge.

For radical feminists in both movements the logical inference of this was that the desire to rape was not abnormal and 'all men were potential rapists'.³⁶ For example, in one article Rachel Adams wrote that men who rape are not 'sex starved maniacs', but someone's brother, father or son.³⁷ Therefore, it was argued, all men benefited from rape, and, significantly, consciously used this fear against women. In 1979, for example, the LRAC argued that every man knew they could use the weapon of rape:

The man who utters obscenities at us in the street knows it, [...] the wolf-whistling building workers know it, the man on the tube reading page three and grinning at us knows it.³⁸

In this analysis, the dynamic of male domination also shaped how feminists viewed consent. As seen earlier in the chapter, the legal definition of consent in both countries was fairly expansive. For many feminists in Britain and France, the sexual imbalance in society meant that women's ability to give consent was impaired, and as MacKinnon wrote, the term rape should therefore be applied

³⁴Rachel Adams, 'How All Men Benefit from Rape', (Undated), reprinted in Rhodes and McNeill, *Women Against*, 31-34. See also Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, 'First Report', February 1979 reprinted in *No Turning Back*, 204; London Rape Action Group, 'Towards', 27.

³⁵London Rape Action Group, 'Towards', 27.

³⁶*F.A.S.T.*, No.1, February 1979, 15; Rape Group (London), 'Against Rape', *Zero*, No.2, August 1977, 1. See also London Rape Action Group, 'Towards', 15.

³⁷Rachel Adams, 'How All Men Benefit from Rape', 33.

³⁸London Rape Action Group, 'Towards', 33.

to any sex 'by compulsion'.³⁹ For British radical feminists then, 'consent was meaningless to men when they are used to over-riding women's feelings most of the time'.⁴⁰ This affected how women thought they should campaign on this issue, with some arguing that it was more important to challenge gender relations than institutions. For example, in one revolutionary feminist article, the authors described the 'loathing, the violence that ALL men feel in greater or lesser degrees for ALL women' and that 'every man is a policeman for male supremacy'.⁴¹ Like *Psych et Po* in France, the only solution, they argued, was 'a Feminist Revolution, the only revolution in history to cut across class, race and nationality to unite the world's most oppressed people'.⁴² In both movements such an approach was perhaps limiting, as it relied on waiting for a possible overhaul of all gender relations, not focusing on incremental change within institutions.

As with lesbian separatism, not everyone in the WLM was happy with this approach, seeing it as one-dimensional. For example, in 1982 Rosalind Coward wrote that revolutionary feminist theory on male violence led to a 'reductive sort of politics' where women's subordination 'was seen through the lens of the one issue of male sexuality'.⁴³ Writing in 1989 Rowbotham expanded on this idea, arguing that radical/revolutionary feminists were focused on a 'rather specific social definition of male sexuality as a ravaging potency constantly seeking passive female prey', that Rowbotham argued negated female agency.⁴⁴ Rowbotham also rejected the extrapolation of individual acts

³⁹MacKinnon, *Toward*, 245. For more information on the feminist approach to consent see, 'Feminist Perspectives on Rape', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2009): <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-rape/#Con> Accessed December 13, 2015.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 32. The movement discussed the idea that female sexuality was seen as inherently passive and as a result women's consent considered unimportant. See London RCC, 'First Report', 210-215; Jill Campbell, 'Battered Women - Self Defence', *Spare Rib*, No.45,

⁴¹ Anonymous, 'Off each other's backs', (Undated Pamphlet, The Women's Library, London, 7SHR/P/02).

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³Rosalind Coward, 'Sexual Violence and Sexuality', *Feminist Review* 11 (1982): 9-22.

⁴⁴Sheila Rowbotham, *The Past is Before Us: Feminism in Action since the 1960s* (Pandora Press, 1989), 253. See also Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought* (Unwin, 1984), 31.

to a broader gender inequality as simplistic, claiming that 'anger against specific actions in which particular men violated women were magnified into an interpretation of social relations in which all men became simply "the enemy"'.⁴⁵ For Rowbotham this was egregious because there was no easy way for women to combat such an outlook, which weakened the scope or potency of any activism. In the same article, for example, she writes that revolutionary feminist theory on rape led to 'a profoundly conservative pessimism', and left feminists 'without strategic recourse. There is simply the reiteration of angers satisfied only by the elimination of men or the contradictory demand for more law and order from the "male-dominated state"'.⁴⁶ Despite this, unlike in the French movement, in Britain, there was arguably a reluctance by many socialist feminists to really push forward a materialist or class analysis of rape, which meant a radical/revolutionary feminist analysis of sexual violence and 'male supremacy' remained influential.

Feminist Activism: Rape Crisis Centres and Protests

In contrast to France, in Britain there was arguably more focus on self-help and protests in the WLM approach to rape. One of the most significant was the Rape Crisis Centres (RCC).⁴⁷ The first RCC opened in London in March 1976, and soon spread elsewhere. The founders aimed to provide a safe and understanding space for rape victims, aligning themselves with the WLM. They provided counselling and support to rape victims; information on the law; and sent out circulars describing the centre to police stations, hospital casualty departments, community health centres and VD clinics.⁴⁸

As with *Choisir* in France, from the start the RCC understood that both changing cultural assumptions and the law were equally important, and that women themselves should lead any change. For example, in a 1977 report from the founding RCC, they described how, in November 1974, a group of around

⁴⁵Rowbotham, *The Past*, 253.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷For more detailed information on the RCC see Helen Jones and Kate Cook, *Rape Crisis: Responding to Sexual Violence* (Russell House Publishing, 2008).

⁴⁸London RCC, 'First Report', 210-215.

forty women 'met to discuss rape with a view "to do something about it"'.⁴⁹ Like *Choisir* in France, and the NAC in the abortion campaigns, RCC was attempting to work with the establishment system while maintaining a feminist approach. For example, in the 1977 report by the London RCC, the authors described the negotiations with other community services and the government, and their move towards charity status, noting that 'our main feelings about becoming a charity were that the need for a centre outweighed any desire to be engaged in overt political campaigning'.⁵⁰ However, in contrast to *Choisir*, who were led by a professional lawyer and worked in the legal sphere, the RCC had a stronger 'outsider' edge, as it was founded and built by women who had no previous experience. For example, in a recent oral history, Jane Meagher described her involvement with the RCC in Edinburgh, and the differences she sees between then and now:

There was no training. Actually we didn't know what the bloody hell we were doing. I mean I was in my twenties, and, it's not to say that [what] we were doing was wrong, but I'm just, it just reminds me of the main differences [...] But you know, everything was completely uncharted. People were hostile of course. But we didn't know, there was no framework to put these things in.⁵¹

This perhaps impacted on the way the authorities viewed them – as less 'mainstream' or 'respectable', unlike Halimi and *Choisir*. As Terry Thomas notes, 'the campaigning work of the Rape Crisis Centres was not always appreciated, especially in its early days', as some in the police or legal community believed they were too amateurish, or that such a space was not

⁴⁹Ibid. See also Victoria Green, 'Crisis Centre Opens', *Spare Rib*, No.46, May 1976, 17-18; Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation* (Picador Press, 1987), 42; Segal, *Is the Future*, 86.

⁵⁰London RCC, 'First Report', 211.

⁵¹Jane Meagher speaking at 'The UK Women's Liberation Movement Scottish Women's Liberation Movement Workshop' (9/05/09), University of Edinburgh, 11. See also 'The UK Women's Liberation Movement Violence Against Women, Women's Liberation Movement History Workshop' (31/01/09), Hillside Leeds, 45 where women from the Bradford RCC discuss their naïveté when they first started working for the RCC. Transcripts for both available at The Women's Library, Glasgow, uncatalogued.

needed.⁵² Yet, arguably, the creation and work of the RCC was significant in challenging existing ideas about rape, despite a lack of widespread funding. For example, they were some of the first to use the term 'rape survivor' instead of 'rape victim', as the former took away the power and agency of women.⁵³ In addition, they demonstrated that such organisations were necessary, and the way the police handled rape cases was insufficient.⁵⁴ As Lovenduski and Randall note, they showed that 'feminist action involved more than collective protection'.⁵⁵ Feminists could create and build organisations too. Although there were attempts to create similar spaces to the RCC by the MLF, these were less widespread. French feminists seem to have been more concerned with criminalising rape, as will be explored later in the chapter.⁵⁶

In both movements, feminists challenged the implementation of the law on rape.⁵⁷ This often resulted in a problematic relationship between feminists and the law. As Setch notes, for many in the WLM, 'laws were in situ, it was believed, to protect not women, but men against the vindictiveness of women'.⁵⁸ The significance in both movements was challenging existing ideas of consent in law, perhaps as a result of the centrality of female autonomy and consent to each movement. For example, the RCC noted that 'our definition of rape is much wider than that of the law. We say that any unwanted, forced or coerced sexual attention is a form of rape'.⁵⁹ In their 'Second Report' in 1978, the London RCC noted that "[t]he present law on rape is historically based on the

⁵²Terry Thomas, *Sex Crime* (Routledge, 2013), 65.

⁵³See London Rape Crisis Centre, *Sexual Violence: The Reality for Women* (Women's Press, 1984 edition).

⁵⁴See Jones and Cook, *Rape Crisis*, 1-36.

⁵⁵Lovenduski and Randall, *Contemporary*, 32

⁵⁶The nearest equivalent was *SOS Femmes*, but they focused more on domestic violence than rape.

⁵⁷Feminist articles challenged press reporting of rape trials, and the behavior of rape victims amongst other topics. See for example Angela Phillips. 'Rape', *Spare Rib*, No.20, February 1974, 30; 'Reality and myth in press reporting', in *Women, Sexuality and Social Control*, eds. Carol Smart and Barry Smart (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 90-91, 96-100.

⁵⁸Setch, *Women's Liberation*, 197.

⁵⁹London RCC, 'First Report', 210-215. For more information, see London RCC, *Sexual Violence*.

belief that a woman's body is the exclusive property of either her father, husband or guardian'.⁶⁰ The revolutionary feminist group Women Against Rape (WAR) also called for a similar definition, demanding 'the recognition of rape of every kind, not only by strangers but by husbands, fathers and stepfathers, not only by physical violence but by blackmail, social pressure and financial pressure' and that 'marriage must not be taken to mean consent to have intercourse when the husband demands it'.⁶¹

In both countries, feminists consequently realised that trial judgments needed to be challenged. Two significant cases were the DPP vs. Morgan case in 1975 and the Maggs case in 1976, and the judgments in each were representative of the problems the WLM saw in the law on rape. In the former, the perpetrator had been told by the woman's husband that she consented, saying she was 'kinky' and would feign protest.⁶² Just as in the 'Aix Trial', examined later in the chapter, what constituted consent and its relationship to spousal privilege was integral to the outcome and framework of feminist campaigning. The jury returned a guilty verdict, but the Law Lords, who ruled that a man should not be convicted of rape if he truly believed the woman gave consent, no matter how unreasonable his belief, overturned the case. The court case was also the impetus behind the 1975 Advisory Group on the Law of Rape, which led to the 1976 Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, a law that

⁶⁰London RCC, 'Second Report', 1978, 1. See also London RCC, *Strength in Numbers: Report of Research by the London Rape Crisis Centre on Women's Experiences of Rape and Sexual Assault* (The Centre, 1984).

⁶¹See also Mary Kerger, 'No, No, Becoming a wife doesn't mean YES for the Rest of your Life', *Warpath*, 2; Ruth Hall, Selma James and Judith Keztesz, *The Rapist Who Pays the Rent: Women's Case for Changing the Law on Rape: Evidence Submitted by Women Against Rape, Britain to the Criminal Law Revision Committee, 1981 and 1984* (Falling Wall Press, 1984).

⁶²Helen Power, 'Sexual Offences, strict liability and mistaken belief: B vs DPP in the House of Lords' in *Web Journal of Current Legal Issues*, November 2, 2011.

<http://webjcli.ncl.ac.uk/2000/issue2/power2.html> Accessed December 13, 2015.

received a mixed reaction from the RCC as they believed it did not improve the position of the rape victim in court.⁶³

The second was the case of Carol Maggs who was sexually assaulted and severely injured by guardsman Tom Holdsworth, who was then only given a suspended sentence, to protect his career and because there was no penile penetration.⁶⁴ Bourke describes the case as an example of civilians being prepared to 'shrug off evidence of abuse by soldiers'.⁶⁵ The judges in the appeal had implied that if the victim had submitted to rape she would not have been so badly hurt, and one article in *Spare Rib* argued that the judgment highlighted 'the old myth that rapists are looking for sex rather than to humiliate'.⁶⁶ The case led to calls for a change in the law by the RCC, which was generally supported by feminists.⁶⁷

Yet, unlike *Choisir's* judicial campaigns, British feminists used protests as their main tactic.⁶⁸ Several feminist groups protested outside the courtroom, including WAVAW, the RCC, and WAR.⁶⁹ As with the abortion campaigns, this resulted in splits over tactics. Unlike in France, where some feminists connected rape trials and class politics, WAR's protests on the Maggs case focused on personal experiences, and civil disobedience. This was perhaps because it was

⁶³RCC, 'First Report', 18; London RCC, 'Second Report', 11; See also Green, 'The Primary Purpose', 464-468; 'Anonymity Recommended', *Spare Rib*. No.43, February 1976, 28; Victoria Green, 'Britain: Rape Bill Lost?', *Spare Rib*, No.48, July 1976, 18. The Act clarified the legal definition of rape, determining that boys under 14 could not be charged with rape; that rape was not possible in marriage; and that only penile penetration was classed as rape, everything else being classed as sexual assault. In addition, although it stipulated that a woman's sexual history could only be exposed in certain cases, this was largely left to the discretion of the judge.

⁶⁴For an account of the trial and aftermath by Carol Maggs see Carol Lambert, *R A P E: Reactive and Psychological Effects* (Author House, 2012), 104-108.

⁶⁵Bourke, *Rape*, 370.

⁶⁶Anonymous, 'How can we', 19.

⁶⁷London RCC, 'Second Report', 9; London RCC, *Sexual Violence*. The only opposition I have found to this is Valerie Sinclair, 'People raping people' in *Revolutionary and Radical Newsletter*, Summer, 1981.

⁶⁸Lambert, *R A P E*, 104, 108.

⁶⁹Anonymous, 'How can we organise against rape?' *Spare Rib*, No.61, August 1977, 19; London RCC, 'Second Report', 9; Jane Dowdeswell, *Women Against Rape* (Thorsons Publishing, 1986).

one of the most significant tactics they had to combat the decision of the courts, and their belief that one individual case could be connected to broader social contexts. Yet, not everyone was happy with this approach. For example, in a 1981 article, Valerie Sinclair argued that WAR were engaging in 'moral blackmail' in trying to convince women to disrupt the court.⁷⁰ The RCC were unhappy with WAR organising a public demonstration in Trafalgar Square at which women were expected to speak out to a mixed audience about their rapes, to be publicised in the press.⁷¹ In their 'Second Report', the RCC explained how they felt calling a demonstration at such short notice was a mere pretence at national mobilisation, and criticised WAR for believing that they could control the media narrative and the treatment of testimonies of raped women.⁷² In addition, the RCC complained that WAR had claimed this hesitancy demonstrated they 'were not angry, radical, concerned enough, and that they were frightened of the police and judges'.⁷³ This arguably demonstrates how, like *Choisir*, RCC's dual identity as a feminist and reformist organisation resulted in tensions with more radical feminists, over what constituted a 'feminist' response. In the sources cited, RCC's main aim was to support rape victims, rather than to overhaul gender relations, which put them at odds with WAR who adopted a more confrontational approach.

Feminist Activism: Reclaiming Public Spaces

Another important initiative for British feminists was the Reclaim the Night (RTN) Movement.⁷⁴ The first march took place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in October 1975, following the murder of a young woman who was stabbed while walking home. Following a report of a march in Berlin in an issue of *Spare Rib*,

⁷⁰Sinclair, 'People Raping People'.

⁷¹Maggs herself was happy to speak at the demonstration and has described how it made her feel connected to other rape survivors. See Lambert, *R A P E*, 104-108.

⁷²London RCC, 'Second Report', 20.

⁷³London RCC, 'Second Report', 20.

⁷⁴For more information on RTN marches see Finn Mackay, *Radical Feminism: Feminist Activism in Movement* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) which provides a radical feminist analysis of the marches and their influence; *The Soho Sixteen and Reclaim the Night* (Soho Sixteen Support Sisterhood, 1978), which was written by sixteen women arrested during the London march in 1977.

it was discussed at the 'Towards a Radical Feminist Theory of Revolution' conference in Edinburgh in 1977, and a group from Leeds decided to adopt the idea.⁷⁵ They were concerned about a series of murders in West Yorkshire later revealed to be those of the so-called 'Yorkshire Ripper'.⁷⁶ As a result, a notice was placed in WIRES calling for RTN marches to take place across Britain.⁷⁷ This demonstrated how feminist activism was often shaped by an awareness of events in other countries, and that women felt part of a broader movement with analogous aims.

The overarching ideas behind RTN marches were similar internationally: women marched, shouting slogans and holding candles, aiming to reclaim a previously feared space and allow women the freedom to walk in safety.⁷⁸ However, there were distinctions between the marches in various British cities. For example, in Leeds and Manchester, the marches focused on male violence and male justification for it.⁷⁹ Unlike in France, where there was no particular case of violence influencing feminist behaviour in adopting these demonstrations, the march in Leeds in November 1977 was shaped by the Sutcliffe murders. For example, the march through the Chapeltown area of the city was chosen to commemorate Jayne MacDonald, the sixteen-year-old victim of Sutcliffe.⁸⁰ As Browne notes, the murders created 'a culture of fear in the local area', and police advised women to stay at home and avoid walking alone at night.⁸¹ This angered many feminists, who, building on the theories of Brownmiller and Hanmer, pointed out the hypocrisy in telling the potential

⁷⁵'Germany Reclaiming the Night', *Spare Rib*, No.61, August 1977, 2; Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 42.

⁷⁶At the time of the RTN marches his identity was unknown.

⁷⁷WIRES, No.36, 1977, 16.

⁷⁸Pat Moan 'We will walk without fear', *Spare Rib*, No.66, January 1978, 22-23; Bouchier, *Feminist Challenge*, 143.

⁷⁹Leeds Reclaim the Night Group letter, *Spare Rib*, No.70, May 1978, 4; Segal, *Is the Future*, 63.

⁸⁰Fairweather, 'Curfew', 10. The march received criticism from some socialist feminists as Chapeltown had a high black population and it was felt that having the march there played into racist stereotypes. See 'Letters', *Spare Rib*, No.70, May 1978, 4-5; Audrey Middleton, 'How feminists reacted', *Spare Rib*, No.88, November 1979, 39.

⁸¹Browne, *Women's Liberation*, 243.

victims – women – to remain indoors, instead of calling for a curfew on men – the potential perpetrators – so women could walk the streets in safety.⁸² For Leeds feminists, the police advice demonstrated another aspect of the victim-blaming prevalent in society's discussion of rape. As one woman taking part in the march argued, the killings were only 'at the extreme end of the scale of violence women face every day; from being touched up in the street at the "frivolous" end of it, through to battering and rape'.⁸³ Consequently the march represented an opportunity for women to reclaim public spaces from the perceived power of men, with women describing the power such collective action gave them.⁸⁴ Yet as Kinnell notes, there was an erasure of the vulnerability of sex-workers in the Leeds march, with no mention of Sutcliffe's other victims and no attempt to build alliances with sex-worker organisations.⁸⁵ This was another example of the problematic relationship between the WLM and sex-workers examined in Chapter Five, and how some in the WLM could discuss solidarity with other women in the abstract, but this did not always result in shared activism.

In London, although the idea of women protesting male violence influenced the march, there was also a focus on images and spaces that objectified women, like sex-shops and adverts.⁸⁶ Like with pornography, for many in the WLM, reclaiming the public space not only meant reclaiming it from male violence, but also from the constant objectification many women experienced. For example, in a recent oral history interview, Sandra McNeill argued that it was the clarity of revolutionary feminist analysis on pornography that influenced the march in London, ensuring it went round Soho and protested about pornography.⁸⁷ Those marching in London stuck stickers on sex-shop

⁸²For example, Fairweather, 'Curfew', 10.

⁸³Ibid. See also Adams, 'How All Men', 33.

⁸⁴See for example Moan, 'We will walk', 22-23.

⁸⁵Hilary Kinnell, *Violence and Sex Work in Britain* (Routledge, 2013), 20.

⁸⁶Amy Brackx, 'Male Violence, Female Dilemma', *Spare Rib*, No.78, January 1979, 9; Ruth Wallsgrove, Angela Phillips and Jill Nichols, 'Retaliation or Celebration', *Spare Rib*, No.80, March 1979, 13.

⁸⁷Sandra McNeill interviewed by Anna Gurun, 17/05/12, 25.

windows stating 'THIS DEGRADES WOMEN, THIS EXPLOITS WOMEN'
alongside chanting:

Yes means yes
No means no
However we dress
Wherever we go.⁸⁸

Despite a common desire to reclaim public spaces shared by all women on the marches, local grievances often contributed to distinctions between cities. This may explain why the Paris march did not have the same impact on the MLF as despite a shared anger, the differing contexts and structures of the movement shaped the campaigns.

Determining whether the British RTN marches were successful is difficult because measuring their impact, both individually and collectively, is problematic. Women who took part in the marches described them in personal terms, seeing them as exhilarating and life-changing, and the first time they truly felt they had challenged male hegemony on the public space. For example, in the same interview, McNeill stated that for her it was:

what I'd been looking for since I'd seen the women outside Miss World. That we were protesting, we were on men's territory, we were articulating what we wanted to articulate, and we were having fun. And making them very uncomfortable, and very unhappy, and very angry.⁸⁹

For Pat Moan, it was 'not like any other march. No stewards, cowed by police, cajoling people to keep the ranks. No. We are all over. Humming, buzzing, shouting. A real woman's march-a rampage. Surging, droning, chanting. Women Fight Rape'.⁹⁰ A woman on the Lancaster march stated that the best thing was the 'constant warmth and support we got from other women. There

⁸⁸Moan, 'We will walk', 22-23.

⁸⁹McNeill Interview, 15.

⁹⁰Moan, 'We will walk', 22. See also, 'The UK Scottish WLM Workshop', 20.

was no arguing about us being extreme or crazy or anti-men. They knew exactly what we were shouting about and shouted their support back'.⁹¹

In terms of allowing women to feel personally empowered, then, the RTN marches were undoubtedly a success. Yet, this did not necessarily result in direct political or legal change. The marches allowed women – if only temporarily – to reclaim public spaces and fight back against the oppression many felt in their daily lives, but this was only on a symbolic level, not a practical one. Despite this, arguably the marches demonstrated one of the most significant results of feminist activism and discussion on rape: the presentation of women's experiences of fear and insecurity as worthy of public debate and public action, even if only symbolic. It is to how these discussions and campaigns were enacted across the Channel that this chapter will now turn.

France

Feminist Approaches to Rape

As in the British context, writing in 2003, Picq argued that, for the MLF, feminist campaigns on rape were representative of issues like physical integrity and bodily autonomy, as in the campaigns for abortion rights.⁹² Rape was discussed from the start of the MLF, yet, as Gill Allwood notes, it was only following the passing of the Loi Veil, that 'violence replaced abortion as the main focal point of French feminist interest', the period that will be examined in this chapter.⁹³ Brownmiller's book was also translated into French and published in the autumn of 1977 when these discussions were at their height.⁹⁴ However, French

⁹¹Moan, 'We will walk', 23.

⁹²Picq, *Libération*, 291. See also Emmanuelle Plas, 'Viol, briser le mur du silence', *L'Unité*, December 3, 1976.

⁹³Gill Allwood, *French Feminisms: Gender and Violence in Contemporary Theory* (Routledge, 2012), 102. See for example Emmanuèle de Lesseps, 'Le Viol', *Partisans: Libération des femmes: année zéro*, No. 54-55, 1970.

⁹⁴Marie Odile Fargier, 'Le Viol Aux Assises', *Choisir, La Cause des femmes*, No.24, February 1977, 6.

feminists opted to campaign in a different manner to the WLM. As Zancarini-Fournel notes it was only in 1975 that 'les féministes, dans un premier temps unies, se battent pour la criminalisation effective du viol' (feminists, united for the first time, are fighting for the effective criminalisation of rape), and it was this that would go on and shape French feminist activism.⁹⁵

Much like British feminists, the MLF analysed rape in the context of broader social contexts, not individual action, including how the threat of rape impacted women, but this often differed by current. The radical group *Féministes Révolutionnaires* argued that the risk of rape was used to keep women in their place within patriarchal society, as social control, and a form of punishment by men against women in the name of the republic. In a 1977 article, for example, they claimed rapists were not 'les réprimés de cette société' (the repressed in society), but instead 'les francs-tireurs' (mavericks/guerillas/free-shooters)⁹⁶ 'les milices privées de la justice patricarale et de l'État qu'elle représente' (the private militias enacting the patriarchal justice of the State which they represent).⁹⁷ Personal experience also played a significant role. For example, on June 26, 1976, 5,000 women attended a Mutualité against rape in Paris. Over ten hours the women discussed their own experiences of rape and sexual assault, calling for collective self-defence and

⁹⁵Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, 'Notre corps, nous-même', in *Le siècle des féminismes*, eds. Éliane Gubin et al. (Les Éditions d'Atelier, 2004), 213. See also Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 194 where Bourg points to 1976 as the key year in the campaigns against rape.

⁹⁶A term generally used to refer to guerrilla fighters, or those operating outside of the laws of war. It literally means 'free-shooters' and was applied to irregular military formations by French troops in the Franco-Prussian War, and later two major French Resistance Movements during World War Two.

⁹⁷Cited in Zancarini-Fournel, 'Notre corps', 213. See also Les Pétoleuses, Texte 5.16, December 1976, in *The Condition of Women in France: 1945 to the Present – A Documentary Anthology*, ed. Claire Laubier (Routledge, 2003), 45 which similarly focuses on rape as a means of social control.

vigilante justice.⁹⁸ Just as with RTN in Britain, this symbolised women reclaiming public spaces for female bodies, and advocating for individual and collective responses by women. Sandrine Garcia also notes that the Mutualité aimed to attract non-activist women to the MLF, through this focus on personal experience.⁹⁹ As with British feminists, the significance of female consent was highlighted, with texts saying: 'Quand une femme dit non, ce n'est pas oui, c'est non!' (When a woman says no, it doesn't mean yes, it means no!).¹⁰⁰ Building on the same theoretical background as the WLM, many in the French movement saw rape as representative of the gender imbalance in society, arguing it was 'un point culminant du sexisme' (the end point of sexism).¹⁰¹ For example, at the Mutualité, they described rape as 'l'expression de la violence permanente faite aux femmes par une société patriarcale. Tout homme est un violeur en puissance' (an expression of the constant violence against women inflicted by patriarchal society. Every man is a potential rapist), linking it to the general objectification of women and, like British radical feminists, extrapolating it to all men.¹⁰²

As Sweatman notes, *Psych et Po* organized various conferences on rape, and used their bookshop and publishing house to broaden the public discourse on male violence.¹⁰³ Like some radical feminists in the WLM, they believed that rape was an abuse of power. Yet, in contrast to groups like WAR, they expanded on this and classed *all* abuses of power as rape. For example, in

⁹⁸ 'Manifeste contre le viol à l'initiative du Mouvement de libération des femmes', *Libération*, June 16, 1976, reprinted in *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes: Textes premiers*, eds. Cathy Bernheim et al. (Éditions Stock, 2009), 250; Bourg, *From Revolution*, 194; Sweatman, *Risky Business*, 71; See also Christiane Chombeau, 'Un millier de femmes ont participé aux "dix heures contre le viol"', *Le Monde*, June 29, 1976.

⁹⁹ Sandrine Garcia, 'Passionate Regulation: Enclosure, Ascesis, and Fall of the Women's Movement in France', in *Materialist Feminism*, eds. Toril Moi and Janice Radway (Duke University Press, 1994), 843.

¹⁰⁰ 'Manifeste contre le viol', 250. See also Dorothy M. Stetson and Dorothy E. McBride, *Women's Rights in France* (Greenwood Press, 1987), 167.

¹⁰¹ *Les Pétroleuses*, Texte 5.16, see also Picq, *Libération*, 239; de Lesseps, 'Le Viol'

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Jennifer L. Sweatman, *The Risky Business of French Feminism: Publishing, Politics and Artistry* (Lexington Books, 2014), 67.

an article in *des femmes en mouvements* from a 1972 Mutualité text, they listed all these abuses:

Pouvoir légal légitimant et autoritaire du père et du frère
aîné
Pouvoir privé du mari sur sa femme comme propriété
Pouvoir de classe du patron
Pouvoir du savoir du médecin et de l'homme de loi
Pouvoir protecteur des flics
Pouvoir naturel, dit-on, tout homme sur toute femme.

(the legal power, legitimising and authoritarian of the father
and older brother
the private power of a husband over his wife, as his property
the class power held by bosses
the power of knowledge held by doctors and lawyers/legal
specialists
the protective power of the cops)
the so-called natural power of all men over all women).¹⁰⁴

Arguably, unlike British radical feminists, the implication from this was not only that rape had nothing to do with sex, but also that it had nothing to do with gender, as class power and police oppression could equally be applied to men. As might be expected, *Psych et Po* also developed a psychoanalytical analysis and framework, which disconnected it from the actual physical act of rape. For example, they wrote:

Ils violent
l'image de leur mère qu'ils n'ont jamais pu posséder
l'image de notre corps qui n'est que le tissu de leurs fantasmes
l'image de notre sexe qui n'est pour eux qu'un sexe pénétrable
vide a déchirer, et a combler
l'image de leur propre féminité qu'ils refoulent soigneusement.

(They rape
the image of their mother whom they have never been able to
possess
the image of our genitals which is only the material of their fantasies
the image of our sex which is for them only an empty vagina to be
penetrated, destroyed and satisfied

¹⁰⁴*des femmes*, 'Tout abus de pouvoir est un viol. Le viol est un abus de pouvoir', *des femmes en mouvement*, No.77, February 1982, 27. For more information on *Psych et Po*'s approach to rape through their bookshop *des femmes*, see Sweatman, *Risky Business*, 67-68.

the image of their own femininity which they carefully repress).¹⁰⁵

This connected rape to a broader theory on the asymmetrical relationships between men and women, but it was also perhaps reductive, condensing rape to another example of power systems destroying women (and perhaps even men). The lack of an equivalent to *Psych et Po* in Britain and the stronger influence of radical/revolutionary feminist theory on the subject meant the WLM never engaged with psychoanalytical theory on rape to the same extent. Arguably this distinction meant that, as so often happened, *Psych et Po* remained locked in an intellectual discussion. It may have created a heightened awareness among readers of the ways male abuse permeated a spectrum of male-female, or societal relationships, but it did not lead to concrete campaigns as in the WLM or *Choisir*.

Feminist Activism: Class and Sexual Violence

Unlike in the British context, bourgeois ethics, race and class played a more significant role in French feminist discussions on rape. The significance of the belief that freeing oneself from bourgeois morality would achieve 'sexual freedom' in French left-wing groups has been explored in the chapters on abortion, lesbianism and rape. As noted, French feminists often had a problematic relationship with such ideas. This was equally true for rape, and led some to provide a feminist analysis of rape in the context of bourgeois oppression. For example, in a 1977 article in *Les Pétroleuses* the author argued it was not surprising that rapes occur, and indeed were increasing in a society:

aux structures rigides, où la famille patriarcale garde sa cohérence, le corps de la femme n'est objet que pour un seul homme père ou mari [...] la loi bourgeoise a rendu les femmes juridiquement libres, la décomposition des institutions et valeurs bourgeoise encourage le défoulement sexuel en maintenant la dévalorisation des femmes et de la sexualité.

(with rigid structures, where the patriarchal family maintains its coherence, a woman's body is merely an object for a single man, be it father or husband [...] the bourgeois law has made women legally free, the break-down of institutions and bourgeois

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 27.

values encourages sexual inhibition while at the same time maintaining the depreciation of women and sexuality).¹⁰⁶

Les Pétroleuses also built on the socialist analysis of the family started by Engels, and combined this with criticism of the traditional family structure prevalent within *soixante-huitard* circles, to argue that conjugal rape was the obvious outcome of the institution of marriage. For example, in another *Les Pétroleuses* article in 1977, the author stated that: 'Le viol, c'est aussi ce qui est sous-entendu dans ce droit sur le corps de sa femme qui est donné sur mari dans l'institution du mariage' (rape is also what is implied in the legal right to his wife's body which is accorded to the husband within the institution of marriage).¹⁰⁷

Marital rape and a materialist analysis of sexual violence also existed in WLM discussions on rape, but arguably the distinction was that, for groups like *Les Pétroleuses*, there was no need to separate the campaign against rape from the broader class struggle; indeed, the discussions on rape should be broadened to include other forms of political repression. Like with pornography, for example, as Picq noted in 2003, for many French feminists, 'le facisme est un viol permanent, le viol est un facisme non reconnu' (fascism is continuous rape, rape is an unrecognised form of fascism).¹⁰⁸ Writing in 2011, Picq also described how, as part of the feminist campaign around the 'Aix trial', a group of women from the MLF decided to form a 'cortège des femmes' (female protest procession/group) to take part in the May 1 demonstrations. They carried banners saying 'Ras le viol!' (Down with rape!) and 'Viol de gauche, Viol de droite, même combat' (Left-wing rape, right-wing rape, same fight).¹⁰⁹ Yet this led to confrontations between the two groups. For example, problems occurred

¹⁰⁶*Les Pétroleuses*, 'Viol', *Les Pétroleuses*, 1977, 10 (Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris, 396 PET Bul).

¹⁰⁷Adrienne 'Le viol: C'est pas un probleme politique, qu'ils disent' *Les Pétroleuses*, 1977, 8 (Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris, 396 PET Bul). See also *Les Pétroleuses*, 'Viol-Violence', *Les Pétroleuses*, 1976, 4 (Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris, 396 PET Bul).

¹⁰⁸Picq, *Libération*, 292. See also, 'Le facisme est un viol permanent, le viol est un facisme non reconnu', *Libération*, October 28, 1975, 2.

¹⁰⁹Picq, *Libération*, 295.

when the trade union *Confédération générale du travail* (CGT)¹¹⁰ decided they did not want the group taking part in the march. Objects were thrown at the female protestors by fellow marchers, alongside verbal harassment such as: 'Si au moins elle étaient belles, on pourrait les peloter' (If only they were beautiful, we could grope them).¹¹¹ Similar situations occurred in Rouen and Toulouse, and as a result some female CGT members ripped up their membership cards and were offered a place in the section of another union the *Confédération française démocratique du travail* (CFDT).¹¹²

Unlike in Britain, these tensions between feminists and male leftists over the limits of 'sexual liberation' played a significant role in French feminist discussions on rape. Martel also identifies feminist judicial activism on rape as one of the most significant reasons for the divergence of lesbian feminists and male gay liberation activists examined in Chapter Three.¹¹³ The major disagreement came from feminist criticism of 'misère sexuelle' (sexual misery),¹¹⁴ mentioned in the Introduction, which was common amongst male French progressives. Unlike in Britain, this shaped some male leftists' approach to rape, and consequently required a response from feminists. As Bourg notes, 'male leftist reaction [in response to feminist discussions on rape] soon reached hysterical proportions and it is difficult in retrospect to treat it with sympathy'.¹¹⁵ There were arguably two noteworthy moments of conflict in this narrative: the rape of a female militant by a male activist in 1973, and the reaction to a series of trials in 1976/1977. The most significant historical analysis of the former is by

¹¹⁰General Confederation of Labour. The first of the five major French Trade Unions, which had strong links with the Communist Party in the 1960s/70s.

¹¹¹Picq, *Libération*, 295.

¹¹²The French Democratic Confederation of Labour, which had links to the Socialist Party in the 1970s.

¹¹³Frédéric Martel, *The Pink and the Black: Homosexuals in France since 1968*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Stanford University Press, 1999), 79.

¹¹⁴The idea of 'sexual misery' as a result of sexual repression was common amongst some left-wing discussions in this period, as a result of the writings of Wilhelm Reich. See Wilhelm Reich, *L'irruption de la morale sexuelle – Étude des origines du caractère compulsif de la morale sexuelle* (Broché, 2007), 33-34. For a feminist response to these ideas see Brigitte, 'La misère sexuelle n'explique pas tout', *Libération*, September 9, 1977; Manifeste contre le viol', 250-251.

¹¹⁵Bourg, *From Revolution*, 195.

Bourg, who examines it in the context of theories of ethics in the post-1968 discourse, not women's liberation.¹¹⁶

The chauvinism of some male leftists came to the forefront of the discussion on a trial concerning a young female militant of Vietnamese origin, Mai, who had been raped by a black activist. When she complained to the trade-union committee about the incident, she was told that her complaint about her rapist reinforced racism, despite her own immigrant background.¹¹⁷ Mai's article following the rape highlighted the problematic relationship of these ideas of bourgeois morality, sexuality and gender. For example, when she told her would-be rapist she did not want to have sex with him, he told her that 'envie' (to want something) was a bourgeois idea.¹¹⁸ Unlike in Britain, where most trade unions did not formulate a theory around rape, the committee of the trade union she and her rapist belonged to debated it, but in the context of racism, and framed it as a personal and not public issue. For example, Mai said she was told that discussing her rape would feed dominant narratives around racism, and rape was a problem between individuals and of no interest to the collective. She summed up their argument as 'Le viol, tout simplement, n'est pas un "problème politique"' (rape is quite simply not a political problem).¹¹⁹ Like Picq, Mai argued this meant that feminists *should* discuss rape in a broader class and imperialist context to combat this, arguing that the domination of male sexuality over female was identical to that of the imperial oppressor over the oppressed.¹²⁰

This was echoed by others in the movement. In an article on the incident in *Libération*, women from the MLF wrote that 'au nom de la révolution, on exige que les femmes se taisent sur les humiliations permanentes qu'elles subissent' (in the name of the revolution, women are made to keep quiet about the

¹¹⁶Diana Leonard and Lisa Adkins have also examined the trial in the context of materialist feminism. See also Diana Leonard and Lisa Adkins, eds., *Sex in Question: French Materialist Feminism* (Taylor & Francis, 1996), 163. Picq also mentions it briefly in *Libération*, 293-296.

¹¹⁷Mai, 'Un viol si ordinaire, un impérialisme, 1974 reprinted in *Les femmes s'entêtent* (Éditions Gallimard, 1975), 188-210. Picq, *Libération*, 295.

¹¹⁸Mai, 'Un viol si ordinaire', 188-210.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Ibid.

constant humiliations that they undergo).¹²¹ Writing on the American context, David Allyn notes that left-wing groups contained those who 'took sexual liberation for granted [...] or looked down on those who elevated sexual politics above civil rights and socialism'.¹²² Unlike in Britain, this can be seen in the discussions between French leftists and feminists on rape, with many in the MLF pointing out the hypocrisy. For example, writing in 1973, Annie Cohen claimed that, although men argued rapists raped because of 'sexual misery', these same men refused to help women who were being oppressed sexually. Likewise, for the writers of the *Libération* article, racism was a fight accepted and fought on by male revolutionaries, while gender inequality was replicated. For example, they wrote that:

La première idée que les hommes se font de nous, c'est que nous sommes des femmes, c'est-à-dire des êtres fragiles, sensibles, intuitifs, coquets, délicats, doux [...] Nous sommes avant tout 'femmes' qui se soumettent plus ou moins passivement au pouvoir des hommes, n'aiment pas la politique, doivent être de bonnes mères etc.

(the first idea that men have of us is that we are women, that's to say fragile, sensitive, intuitive, coquettish, delicate, soft [...] We are above all 'women' who submit more or less passively to the power of men, who don't like politics, who must be good mothers etc.).¹²³

In contrast to Britain, the strength of theories around 'sexual misery' meant this tension bled into other French feminist debates on rape, following a series of trials in 1976/77. Bourg notes the real moment of conflict between male leftists and some feminists was in March and April 1977, when *Libération* held a debate on sexual violence.¹²⁴ Problems arose over the extent to which some male activists equated 'sexual liberation' and rape following a trial about the rape of Brigitte Riballier, a twenty-six-year-old woman. Many feminists were outraged at comments made by the defence lawyer Roger Koskas, who argued

¹²¹'Au nom de la révolution', *Libération*, November 8, 1973, reprinted in *MLF*, 246.

¹²²David Allyn, *Make Love, Not War: The Sexual Revolution, an Unfettered History* (Taylor & France, 2001), 229.

¹²³'Au nom de la révolution', 245.

¹²⁴Bourg, *From Revolution*, 195; id. "Your sexual revolution", 90-103.

that the defendant's 'sexual misery' was to blame and that women had been willing to sacrifice a 'poor guy' who had committed a 'crime of love'.¹²⁵

As occurred with the 1973 incident, many left-wing activists focused on the ethnicity and class of the Egyptian defendant, placing them as more important than sexual violence.¹²⁶ Building on these ideas, three articles written by men were published in *Libération*, which politicised violence and argued that justice was rotten and bourgeois, and consequently should be ignored. In one, Hocquenghem compared feminist and gay men's reactions to rape, claiming he had never heard of any gay man complaining about being raped, as they knew it was pointless and 'it definitely seems that the anus of the gay man is not endowed with the same transcendental qualities as the vagina'.¹²⁷ Like his views on homosexuality, his article rarely engaged with power dynamics, or consent. Mohammed, who had previously claimed in a 1970 issue of *Partisans* (mentioned in Chapter One), that French women were racist for refusing to sleep with him, wrote another of the articles. Echoing arguments put forward after the 1973 rape, he claimed that race discrimination was more important than sexual violence, and complained that an immigrant was repressed if he went on strike, demonstrated, or attempted to sleep with a woman.¹²⁸ In *Le deuxième sexe*, de Beauvoir notes how men make women the Other, just as the racist American makes the black man the Other. The reaction of some French male leftists to feminist demands on rape demonstrates this: there was a hierarchy of 'othering' within their politics, with racism higher on the agenda than sexism, perhaps because gender inequality was too problematic for them to approach.

¹²⁵Martine Storti, 'La 16ème chambre correctionnelle se declare incompetente', *Libération*, March 22, 1977; Françoise, 'Réponse à Maître Koskas', *Libération*, March 29, 1977.

¹²⁶See 'L'avocat de son agresseur: "ce n'est pas la répression qui va améliorer les rapports entre hommes et femmes"', *Libération*, March 21, 1977; Marie Odile Fargier, 'Un tribunal qui refuse de juger', *Le Matin*, March 22, 1977.

¹²⁷Guy Hocquenghem, 'V-I-O-L', *Libération*, March 29, 1977, reprinted in Guy Hocquenghem, *La dérive homosexuelle* (Jean-Pierre Delarge, 1977). Translations from Bourg, *From Revolution*.

¹²⁸'Un viol en cache toujours un autre': une lettre de Mohamed sur le viol et le racisme,' *Libération*, April 5 1977.

As Michel Sibalís notes, in France, ‘from the outset, the struggle for sexual liberation took place in parallel with the denunciation of ‘sexual misery’.¹²⁹ Bourg also notes how a ‘far-left discourse of criminality [...] had been associated with the far-left since the nineteenth-century and had resurfaced in the post-1968 era of radical agitation’.¹³⁰ The strength of these ideas may explain why a supposed ‘betrayal’ by French feminists was seen as much more damaging than in the British context, and why the MLF and others discussed rape more frequently in a class context. The accusation of betrayal of the *soixante-huitard* promise tended to be thrown at French feminist campaigns on rape more than any other subject, arguably because it was the most ‘anti-men’ issue, and the one that called for direct change from men. According to Picq, writing in 2011, for many on the far-left, justice was seen to have been served when an employer was imprisoned over accidents at work, ‘mais quand il s’agit de viol, cela devient un insupportable appel à la répression, une inqualifiable complicité avec la justice de classe’ (but when it comes to rape, it develops into an unbearable appeal for repression, and unqualified complicity with class justice).¹³¹ Arguably this demonstrates more resistance to feminist ideas among the male, French left than in Britain. As argued above, in the Maggs trial and other discussions, the WLM instead connected the judgments to male violence, not male leftist hypocrisy.

¹²⁹Michael Sibalís, ‘The Gay Liberation Movement in France’, in *Sexual Revolutions*, eds. Gert Hekma and Alain Giami (Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 188.

¹³⁰Bourg, *From Revolution*, 198. Bourg also highlights Guy Lamont, ‘Le Féminisme et le viol’, in *Le Comité d’action des prisonniers: journal des prisonniers*, May, 1977, where, while serving time in prison, Lamont wrote that only a total revolution and not the existing judicial system would solve the problem of rape.

¹³¹Picq, *Libération*, 300. See also Groupe de femmes avocates et non-avocates, ‘La lutte juridique a été utilisée dans le combat révolutionnaire’, *Libération*, June 26-27, 1976; *Féministes Révolutionnaires*, ‘Patriarchal Justice and the threat of rape’, 1976, English translation from Rhodes and McNeill, *Women Against*, 35-39.

Feminist Activism: Rape and The Judicial System

Over the next few years, these issues grew as sexual violence was discussed more widely.¹³² As Bourg notes: 'broader debate on rape forced to the surface many cultural "a priori" or predispositions, which form even today part of the social imaginary'.¹³³ As mentioned, the use of trials as a French feminist campaigning tactic was one of the most significant distinctions between the two movements. As Dagmar Herzog notes this was partly a result of the success of the 'Bobigny Trial'.¹³⁴ The trial examined in this section is the 'Aix-en-Provence Trial' in 1977, which concerned two Belgian tourists raped whilst camping. It was prosecuted by Halimi with the backing of *Choisir*, and arguably played a similar role to the 'Bobigny Trial' in the abortion campaigns.

As with the Morgan trial in Britain, although the rapists in the 'Aix Trial' were eventually found guilty, the defence lawyers focused on consent to argue their innocence. They argued that the victims had given their consent, and what had occurred was not rape (which they classed as penetration of the vagina and not injury to the vagina) but merely 'draguer' (flirting, chatting up).¹³⁵ The trial was held in the Cour D'Assises.¹³⁶ Halimi insisted on an open trial, not *huis*

¹³²For example, Michèle Solat, 'Les féministes et le viol', *Le Monde*, October 18-20 1977; Claudine Hermann, 'Le viol et la violence', *Les Temps Modernes*, No.375, October 1977; Elisabeth Salvresi, 'Un dialogue de sourdes aux Dossiers de l'écran', *Libération*, October 20, 1977.

¹³³Bourg, *From Revolution*, 202. See for example, Yolande A, 'Rompre le mur du silence', *Le Monde*, January 1 1978; Jacques Ellul, 'Le Viol et le désir', *Le Monde*, January 3, 1978.

¹³⁴Dagmar Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 167.

¹³⁵Bernardi, 'Quand une femme', 5.

¹³⁶For more information on the impact of the 'Aix Trial' on later legislative debates, see Georges Vigarello, *A History of Rape: Sexual Violence in France from the 16th to the 20th Century* (Polity Press, 2000), 206-214; Janine Mossuz-Lavau, *Les lois de l'amour: les politiques de la sexualité en France de 1950 à nos jours* (Éditions Payot, 1991).

clos.¹³⁷ In contrast to the British trials mentioned, the two victims in the 'Aix Trial' – Anne Tonglet and Araceli Castellano – were fully involved in the presentation of the trial as a feminist campaign. For example, they were not only prominent in any photographs or media stories but also frequently discussed and publicised the importance of their own feminist beliefs. They wrote about why they believed feminism was needed, how women were oppressed and subjugated by a patriarchal society, and what women should do together to enact concrete change.¹³⁸ Halimi's desire to make the 'Aix Trial' as transparent as possible also extended to the description of the attack. In articles on the trial, testimonies were published almost verbatim and graphic details given of the rape. For example, in an 1978 article written by the victims, they described how they had tried to defend themselves with a hammer, how one victim had to have an abortion following the attack, and how during the rape, the men discussed amongst themselves whether the victims knew if 'ils jouissaient ou pas' (they [the rapists] had come/enjoyed it or not).¹³⁹

Halimi herself saw the 'Aix Trial' as not about an individual case, but an attempt to counteract the narrative of repression of sexual violence prevalent in society:

par la subversion (dans le meilleur sens du mot) des idées reçues, des tabous, d'une culture en somme qui, depuis toujours, a considéré le viol comme un épiphénomène tantôt nécessaire, tantôt regrettable de la nature.

¹³⁷ See Gisèle Halimi, 'Nous ne voulons pas faire les frais du malheur des hommes', *Choisir, La Cause des femmes*, No.23, January 1977, where Halimi discussed her belief that trials around taboo subjects like rape and abortion should be tried in open court and not 'huis clos'; Marie Odile Fargier, 'Le Viol Aux Assises', *Choisir, La Cause des femmes*, No.24, February 1977, 6. In the judicial field *huis clos* refers to a closed hearing or trial that is not attended by the public. They are often used for trials of minors, or of sensitive nature, including rape and sexual assault.

¹³⁸ Anne Tonglet, and Araceli Castellano, 'Notre combat', *Choisir, La Cause des femmes*, No.25, June 1977, 6. See also Anne Tonglet and Araceli Castellano, 'Insoutenable débat: le vôtre', *Libération*, May 12, 1978.

¹³⁹ Françoise Bernardi, 'Quand une femme dit non, c'est non', *Choisir, La Cause des femmes*, No.33, June 1978, 5.

(by subverting [in the best possible sense of the word] of commonly held notions and taboos of a culture which in short has always considered rape as a natural phenomenon, sometimes necessary, sometimes regrettable).¹⁴⁰

Unlike the approach of RCC, for Halimi, just as in the 'Bobigny Trial', the victims themselves placing their case in a 'feminist' context was a better catalyst for enacting wider legal and social change than just questioning the laws on rape.¹⁴¹ It allowed the women to reclaim their own narrative of the crime, and demonstrate they were not ashamed. As Allwood notes, the question of consent played a significant role in French feminist campaigns in the courts, as in the WLM.¹⁴² Unlike in the Maggs trial, Halimi's approach meant that a feminist analysis of consent could be publicised in the trial itself.¹⁴³ Ultimately, the WLM and RCC reacted to existing rape trials, whereas *Choisir* constructed and pioneered trials as organs for further social change. It perhaps meant the WLM lost an opportunity to publicise a 'feminist' view on rape through the judicial system.

There was some broader feminist support for Halimi's approach. For example, women from the MLF demonstrated outside the courtroom, holding banners saying 'Anne et Araceli, nous sommes avec vous' (Anne and Araceli, we're with you) and 'Contre le viol; solidarité' (Against rape; solidarity).¹⁴⁴ Picq and others also organised a few 'manifs de nuit' (night protests) which were similar in scope and aim to the RTN protests in Britain. As in the London demonstration, at one protest on March 4, 1978 in Paris, the connection between rape and pornographic images was made, with women invading pornographic shops, and burning pornographic books and inflatable dolls.¹⁴⁵ However, arguably these marches did not have as significant a place within the

¹⁴⁰Halimi, 'Le Crime', 10.

¹⁴¹Gisèle Halimi, 'Le Crime' (1978), reprinted in id., ed. *Viol: Le procès d'Aix-en-Provence, Sténographie intégrale des débats et des témoignages*, (L'Harmattan, 2012), 13. See also Marie Cardinal, 'Le Viol est un crime', *Le Monde*, February 3, 1976; Gisèle Halimi, 'Viol: le crime culturel', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, May 22, 1978.

¹⁴²Allwood, *French Feminism*, 107-110.

¹⁴³See for example Fargier, 'Le Viol', 6.

¹⁴⁴Bernardi, 'Quand une femme', 5-8.

¹⁴⁵Picq, *Libération*, 303. See also, Zancarini-Fournel, 'Notre corps', 214.

French feminist campaigns as they did in Britain, probably due to the lower level of interest in pornography campaigns among French feminists. This meant that although some in the MLF connected sexual violence and women feeling unsafe in public spaces, the resulting direct action was arguably not significant to the movement.

Yet, as already noted, the relationship between other feminists and *Choisir* was often problematic. Halimi's approach was, as she had done in the abortion campaign, to use establishment figures to convince people of the need to change the law. For example, in one copy of *Choisir*'s periodical, there are pages of testimonies and op-eds from various politicians and lawyers, both male and female, explaining why they believed the law should be changed. Their arguments are not identical to feminist ones, as like in the 'Bobigny Trial', they tended to centre on sparse, common sense arguments, without any ideological sheen of female bodily autonomy.¹⁴⁶ Like in the 'Bobigny trial', establishment experts, particularly male ones, lent the campaign a sense of gravitas and presented rape as not just a feminist issue, but a societal one. However, as with abortion, some feminists believed that letting male or establishment figures appropriate feminist issues weakened women's voices. For example, writing in 1978, Halimi described how critics of her approach – from fellow feminists to the right-wing – complained that she was sullyng the reputation of the courts by attempting to make the trial about anything other than the accused.¹⁴⁷ Her response was one of pride in her approach, writing: 'Eh oui, *Choisir* et moi, nous plaçons coupables! Nous avons commis le crime d'avoir voulu provoquer un débat de société à partir d'un procès exemplaire' (*Choisir* and I plead guilty! We have committed the crime of wanting to provoke a debate within society on the basis of an exemplary trial/case).¹⁴⁸ This was a criticism that was never leveled at the WLM. Like the abortion campaigns, it perhaps demonstrates how *Choisir*'s at-times strained relationship with others in the MLF impacted French feminist discussions and campaigns, meaning other feminists had to figure out how to respond to *Choisir*'s activism.

¹⁴⁶Bernardi, 'Quand une femme', 5-8; Halimi, *Viol*, 285-301.

¹⁴⁷Halimi, 'Le Crime', 10.

¹⁴⁸Ibid.

Concern about the efficacy of using criminal trials as a campaigning tool also spread to other trials. In contrast to the WLM, there were disagreements – including between some feminists – over the extent to which justice and not repressive vengeance was being served. While in Britain groups like WAR criticised sentences as being too weak, some French feminists began to be concerned at the severity of the sentences handed out. For example, in a case in 1978 an immigrant was sentenced to twenty years in prison, which some saw as too severe.¹⁴⁹ This led to a discussion by some French feminists over whether severe sentences were the best way to change dominant narratives around sexual violence. For example, in 1976, lawyers from the *Ligue du droit des femmes* wrote that:

Ce n'est pas l'emprisonnement de l'agresseur qui changera sa mentalité et qui lui apprendra qu'une femme est un être humain. Par conséquent, cette peine est inutile, puisqu'elle n'apporte rien aux femmes et ne fait pas évoluer les mentalités.

(It is not the imprisonment that will change the attitude of an assailant, and teach him that a woman is a human. Therefore this punishment is useless because it does nothing for women and does not help to change attitudes).¹⁵⁰

Some were also worried by calls for monetary compensation. For example, writing in 1978, even Halimi herself criticised what she termed 'autojustice' by some in the MLF, influenced by the American movement. For Halimi this was:

le règlement de compte, la sanction décidée et exécutée par les victimes devenues justicières. Les violeurs seront enlevés, émasculés ou tués. Je vois dans cette démarche une terrible erreur du mouvement féministe.

¹⁴⁹The case concerned a young immigrant man who was sentenced to 20 years in prison. See for example Picq, *Libération*, 300; Martine Storti, 'Viol: 20 ans, c'est pas possible', *Libération*, February 24, 1978; id., 'Des dangers de la reconnaissance du viol sans violence', *Libération*, February 22, 1978.

¹⁵⁰Martine Le Péron, 'Priorité aux violées', *Questions Féministes* 3 (1978): 84; Allwood, *French Feminisms*, 107.

(settling scores, with the punishment decided and executed by the victim turned judge. Rapists will be taken away/removed, castrated or killed. I see this approach as a terrible mistake by the feminist movement).¹⁵¹

For these writers, attempting to enact social change, or provide a 'feminist' analysis through the courts could prove dangerous and counter-productive.

As Bourq notes, 'feminists were upset that their discourse had been usurped by the judicial establishment.'¹⁵² Writing in 2003, Picq echoed this, writing that 'la campagne contre le viol sert d'alibi à la répression' (the campaign against rape becomes the alibi for repression).¹⁵³ Others pointed to the fact feminists had conflicting aims. For example, writing in 1978 in QF, Martine Le Péron noted:

Nous sommes affrontées à une contradiction: d'une part, nous nous battons contre le crime de viol, et nous révélons l'oppression spécifique qu'en tant que femmes nous subissons, en utilisant l'appareil judiciaire; mais d'autre part, nous devons nous confronter à la logique répressive de cet appareil: à son système carcéral, et surtout, à sa misogynie virulente.

(We are faced with a contradiction: on one hand, we are fighting against rape and by using the judiciary system we reveal the specific oppression that we as women have suffered; but on the other hand, we have to face up to the repressive logic of this criminal justice apparatus [the legal system]: both its prison system and above all, its virulent misogyny).¹⁵⁴

Although WAR did protest trials in Britain, the main focus of the WLM was arguably on making public spaces feel more secure for women, or creating supportive organisations like the RCC, not enacting legal and social change through the courts. In France, *Choisir's* tactics did create a wide debate on rape and allowed feminists to put forward their views, but it also meant control was ceded to the broader justice system. Attempting to change dominant social

¹⁵¹ Halimi, 'Le Crime', 15.

¹⁵² Bourq, *From Revolution*, 202.

¹⁵³ Picq, *Libération*, 301. See also Mariella Righini, 'Le prix du viol', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, March 25, 1978; Laurent Greilsamer, 'La Prison n'est pas un solution,' *Le Monde*, January 27, 1978.

¹⁵⁴ Le Péron, 'Priorité', 83.

narratives and opinions through the judicial system was always going to be fraught. As many articles noted, despite the intentions of those involved, rape was never on trial, only the rapist.¹⁵⁵

Conclusion

Influenced by ideas coming from the United States, feminist discussions on rape in both movements had significant similarities. Both redefined rape as a crime of violence, and argued that it should be viewed in the context of broader gender inequality, not the act of a 'deviant' individual. This resulted in feminists in both movements arguing that the fear of rape was a form of social control, and emphasising that the definition of consent should be re-examined. However, despite these resemblances in theoretical discussions, there were often differences in tactics. In Britain, feminists reclaimed public spaces through RTN and established new, supportive feminist organisations like the RCC. In contrast, *Choisir* campaigned through trials, using criminal justice as a means to effect legal and social change, which led to more debates about the efficacy of working within the judicial system for social change than in Britain. Moreover, in contrast to the WLM, the interconnection of bourgeois morality, sexuality, and race and colonialism surfaced in discussions between French feminists and male leftists. It resulted in heated debates between the two groups, and led some French feminists to call for rape to be classed as another form of political repression. Despite this, although attitudes to and legislation about rape did not change right away, the real legacy of the actions of British and French feminists was in demonstrating that rape was something that was worth campaigning about, and providing an analysis of sexual violence that continues to be influential today.

¹⁵⁵ Béatrice Vallaeys and M.C Husson, 'Le Mans: du procès du viol au procès d'un violeur', *Libération*, January 27, 1978.

Conclusion

In the 1969 article that popularised the term 'the personal is political', the American feminist Carol Hanisch described how cr groups showed her that politics and her own personal experiences were not mutually exclusive. Hanisch wrote: 'personal problems are political problems. There are no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution', an idea evidently at the heart of the international women's liberation movements.¹ As has been seen, British and French second-wave feminist debates on sexuality best represented this fusion of the personal and political, and were some of the most innovative and influential aspects of the movements in both countries. These debates were arguably the real engines behind the movements, and one of the major ways by which second-wave feminists differed from previous women's movements. Earlier feminists had tended to concentrate on legal reforms such as the vote and employment rights, rights that would enable women to enter the public sphere on equal terms. For British and French feminists in the mid-late-twentieth century, this was insufficient. For them, any campaign must also encompass their private lives.

The overarching aim of this study was to compare how feminists in each country approached sexuality and how this shaped their activism, from questions on the relationship between class and sexuality to tensions between reformist and radical factions. Second-wave feminism in Britain and France was also part of an underlying social and cultural change happening across Europe and North America in the mid-late-twentieth century. A comparative approach allowed for an examination of each movement in relation to the other, and enabled an exploration of the extent to which these two parallel movements were comparable in how they dealt with sexuality.

¹Carol Hanisch, 'The Personal is Political' (1969). Originally published in New York Radical Women, *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation* (1970).

A Comparative Approach: The Context of Sisterhood

The historiography on the women's liberation movements in Britain and France has grown considerably over the last few decades. However, despite some recent works on the movement, including those of Kristina Schulz, who examined the campaigns around abortion in West Germany and France, and Françoise Flamant, who examined radical feminism and lesbianism in various European countries, there has been remarkably little comparison of second-wave feminism and sexuality.² In addition, as outlined in the Introduction, participants of second-wave feminism have authored many of the major writings on the British and French movements. Many activists, including Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal, or Françoise Picq entered academia and consequently shaped the later 'historiographical' analyses. This has blurred the distinction between primary and secondary sources. Analyses written by a younger generation of academics not directly involved in the movement have emerged in recent years, although many of these are studies of each movement as a whole and not specifically campaigns on sexuality. Building on this recent historiography, this thesis has consequently been an attempt to provide a necessary first step towards a broader comparative analysis of the women's movement and sexuality.

This approach has shown there were numerous resemblances between the two movements. Alongside the 1968 and anti-Vietnam protests, and gay liberation movement, the second-wave was one of the most significant 'new social movements' pushing for social and cultural change in the 1960s-1980s. Both the French and British movements had analogous 'currents', including those more concerned with class politics, and other who believed sexuality should be examined in the context of male oppression. Both also campaigned on the same issues at roughly the same time, and advocated a similar approach, basing political activism on personal experiences. As noted in Chapter One, women in each movement had similar backgrounds, with the

²Kristina Schulz, *Der lange Atem der Provokation: Die Frauenbewegung in der Bundesrepublik und in Frankreich 1968-1976* (Campus Verlag, 2002); id., 'Echoes of Provocation: 1968 and the Women's Movements in France and Germany' in *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968 and 1989*, eds. Gerd-Rainer Horn and Padraic Kenney (Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

majority being white, middle-class, and university-educated. Furthermore, they were also part of the generational shift that occurred over much of Western Europe in this period. Both countries had seen economic growth, an increase in the number of female students at university, and similar political uprisings. This influenced the shape of the discussions in each movement, and helps explain why their approaches were so alike. Many feminists became politically conscious through involvement with this broader left-wing progressive wave, such as the New Left and the events of May 1968. This led socialist feminists in both countries to try to combat broader systems of oppression – economic and sexual – but also ensure women’s experiences and voices were listened to, which led to tension over the limits of politicising the personal. For example, one of the central questions of abortion campaigns was whether the ends justified the means, and ensuring your demands were met more important than remaining true to an ‘authentic’ feminist analysis.

Both movements grappled with the legacy of ‘sexual liberation’. As noted in Chapter Five, for example, feminists in both countries found pornography a difficult subject to discuss as left-wing ideas of ‘sexual freedom’ and anti-censorship came up against women’s personal discomfort with the impact of sexualised images on male behaviour. Discussions on sexuality were also often about the relationship between men and women. As seen in Chapter Two for example, some feminists argued male progressives supported abortion on demand only because it made it easier for men to have sex without the fear of pregnancy. Moreover, as argued in Chapter Five, the discomfort some feminists felt about prostitution was often because it dealt with male sexuality and was the most naked example of how sexuality was linked to the asymmetrical power relationship between men and women. This also explains why lesbianism was such a central issue for the movements in each country, as calls for separatism bypassed this problem by writing men out of women’s lives.

As underlined in the Introduction, unlike first-wave feminism, the second-wave had no formal, structured international movement. Feminists in each country often saw themselves as members of a global ‘sisterhood’, for example taking part in marches to mark International Women’s Day, or publicising the plight of women abroad. In feminist publications like *Spare Rib* or *des femmes* there were frequently articles about the lives of women in other countries. As

seen in the chapter on abortion, for example, some members of the MLAC went to England to learn how to perform abortions themselves, while, as noted in Chapter Six, the RTN marches were an example of women being influenced by feminist behaviour abroad, even if there was not direct links between the movements. Despite this, it was often feminist theory that crossed borders. As mentioned in Chapter Four, some British radical/revolutionary feminists were influenced by the work of French theorists like Monique Wittig and Christine Delphy on lesbianism. The American WLM was also a significant influence, and ideas including cr, or new theories trickled through from the United States. For example, as highlighted in Chapter Six, Susan Brownmiller, Andrea Dworkin and Catharine A. MacKinnon influenced the feminist definition of rape as a crime of violence, and result of broader social contexts, not individualism. Women's liberation was taking place in a period of the expansion of the media, where ideas could spread rapidly. Many feminists in both countries were well educated, globally aware, particularly around progressive politics, and part of this broader wave of activism. All this helps explain why the two movements took such similar approaches.

As noted in the Introduction, there has been a tendency by foreign commentators on French women's liberation to focus on psychoanalytical theory or abstract intellectualism, rather than activism. It is certainly true that *Psych et Po* meant more interest in psychoanalytical theory in French than British feminism. Yet French feminists did engage in widespread practical activism and collective action, from protests and marches to *Choisir's* reformist and very pragmatic approach. As seen in Chapter Four, by examining the actions of MLAC, *Choisir* and others this thesis has shown that the British stereotype of French feminism as almost entirely intellectual is incorrect, since both movements combined theoretical discussions with practical action.

Yet, my research has uncovered no widespread collaboration or direct exchange between feminists in Britain and France, despite the similarity in issues and approaches. This was perhaps due to linguistic and cultural differences, or differing political contexts, but it meant that, even though feminists often felt part of a larger 'female experience', the women's movement in each country did not seem to view cross-cultural exchange and support as key elements of their campaigns. This demonstrates that, despite an awareness

of broader global events, the main focus by each movement was on effecting local and national change, not joining with others from abroad.

A Comparative Approach: Diverging Movements

It was this national context, be it legal or social, that significantly changed the shape and progression of feminist campaigns in each country. Although the place of religion differed between Britain and France, this did not impact on feminist approaches to sexuality as much as would be expected, although the strength of the organised moral right in Britain did frequently shape debates there. As argued in Chapter Four, for example, much of the discussion on pornography in the WLM was shaped by the actions of right-wing moral purists, which made it harder for feminists to speak out on the issue. A similar reluctance can also be seen in how British feminists discussed abortion, with weaker focus on the broad spectrum of feelings women could have on the subject. Arguably, the WLM was often so concerned about making sure their arguments did not ape those of moral purists or the religious right that they sidelined nuance to maintain a collective voice.

Rather than religion, my research suggests that it was the differing legal contexts that had a more extensive impact. Questions on the efficacy of a reformist approach existed in both movements, but the contrasting legal situation of abortion and rape shaped each campaign differently. It led the WLM to work with trade unions and the NAC in the abortion campaigns, to put political pressure on politicians, a relationship that was often problematic. Although calling for a change in the law, organisations like RCC were more concerned about creating safe spaces for women, despite the at-times fractured relationship between the RCC and some radical feminists. In contrast, the French movement used the courtroom to campaign. This was a result of the existence of *Choisir*, and Gisèle Halimi's occupation as a lawyer alongside the broader legal context. French feminists wanted to change the laws and had the vehicle to do it. The WLM never engaged with trials to the same extent, and this could possibly be seen as a lost opportunity. This context also shaped the progression of the feminist belief in the importance of female autonomy. This was significant for both movements: whether sexual autonomy, bodily

autonomy, or merely the freedom to walk down a street without feeling unsafe. Both advocated women taking control of their own lives, and self-help but they took different forms. In France, for example, the legal place of abortion also led some in the MLAC to learn how to perform abortions themselves whereas there was no need for this in Britain as abortion was already legal. Instead, it was the RCC that best represented the British feminist approach to self-help.

Yet, absolute female autonomy arguably was not truly advocated by feminists in both countries, with many of their discussions implying limits to an 'identity politics' approach. The divisive impact of political lesbianism separated sexual behaviour into acceptable and non-acceptable groups, while also sidelining the variations of life experiences between heterosexual and lesbian women. One distinction between British and French feminists on this question can be seen in the discussions on prostitution. As seen in Chapter Five, British feminists felt able to discuss the ways prostitution legislation economically oppressed women, but found it harder to engage with the realities of prostitutes, as it was outside of their own personal experience. Groups like *Les Pétroleuses* or *Cercle Flora Tristan*, in contrast, found it easier to view prostitute activism in the context of female solidarity, or anti-establishment politics, not male sexuality.

This was perhaps a result of the stronger clarity of the radical/revolutionary analysis of pornography, prostitution or rape to many in the WLM, which contributed to a more problematic relationship between socialist feminists and issues dealing with men. As my research has shown, there was a more widespread application of class analysis to sexuality by groups like *Les Pétroleuses* and others than in Britain. French left-wing groups discussed sexuality in the context of bourgeois morality and oppression, arguing that political consciousness and the eradication of sexual shame were inseparable. Although the relationship between male leftists and feminists was not always harmonious, this principle perhaps influenced the way some French feminists approached sexuality, unlike in Britain. The belief that lesbianism or pornography could be tied to class politics was arguably more widespread in the French movement, for example, perhaps pointing to a stronger element of 'prudishness' in some WLM discussions on pornography. In addition, although both movements saw rape as a crime of violence and not sex, some French

feminists seemed more comfortable with extrapolating that definition, and drawing comparisons between sexual violence and political repression. Some in the MLF were also more comfortable discussing abortion in the context of sexual pleasure than in the WLM, as a result of this connection between revolutionary politics and sexual shame.

Finally, another significant element was the contrasting structures of the two movements. The influence of the 'Seven Demands' meant the WLM disagreed on how to define, and act on, the right to a self-defined sexuality, leading to more divisive schisms on the subject than the MLF. The larger number of organised, independent groups in France often shaped campaigns. The presence of *Les Gouines Rouges* and FHAR meant that lesbian feminists often felt stuck between gay liberation activists and the MLF, unlike in the WLM. The actions of *Psych et Po* resulted in a stronger psychoanalytical approach in the MLF, and more abstract disagreements on sexuality. In addition, the actions of *Psych et Po*, *Choisir* or MLAC meant that despite sharing similar ideas, they were often classed as 'outside' the MLF, and campaigned fairly autonomously. This led to women in the MLF having to decide whether to support these campaigns, and more discussion on how to 'define' the MLF. What all these points show is that despite a shared approach and feeling of being part of a broader movement, the WLM and MLF often applied these ideas in differing ways, which was what distinguished one from the other.

Looking Forward

The comparative approach of my research has demonstrated that, despite contrasting cultures, there were a great number of parallels between the feminist analysis of sexuality in Britain and France. Coming of age at a time when constraints around sexuality and sexual behaviour were loosening, feminists politicised sexuality and demonstrated how personal issues could be campaigned on within the public sphere. Both movements also positioned individual experiences as the foundation of collective action, arguing that sexuality and sexual behaviour should not be disconnected from the broader context of inequality and economic oppression of women. The sheer number of broad similarities between the two movements is noteworthy in demonstrating that, although there was little direct exchange between the two, they both were

part of a larger 'whole' – of a movement that occurred in various countries at the same time. Ultimately, the differences between the two movements was often in the detail. On both sides of the Channel, feminists had parallel ideas around sexuality, but the aims and form of their debates and activism often differed, shaped by particular local problems and the national context.

This study aimed to create the first platform for wider comparative studies between Britain and France, and other European countries. Not having participated in the movements themselves has also placed me as part of a growing historiography that hopefully will continue to develop and provide fresh analysis of the place of second-wave feminism in each country. There is still a need for more pan-European analysis of second-wave feminism, in order to explore differences and similarities between the various national movements. What my research has shown is that in both Britain and France, the second-wave feminist approach to sexuality was innovative, vibrant and exciting, as women challenged dominant and oppressive norms. It was these debates that helped make – and continue to make – second-wave feminism one of the most influential and stimulating social movements of the late-twentieth century.

Appendix I: The Seven Demands

Passed at the National Women's Liberation Conference, Skegness 1971.

1. Equal Pay Now.
2. Equal Education and Job Opportunities.
3. Free Contraception and Abortion on Demand.
4. Free 24-hour Nurseries.

Passed at the National Women's Liberation Conference, Edinburgh 1974.

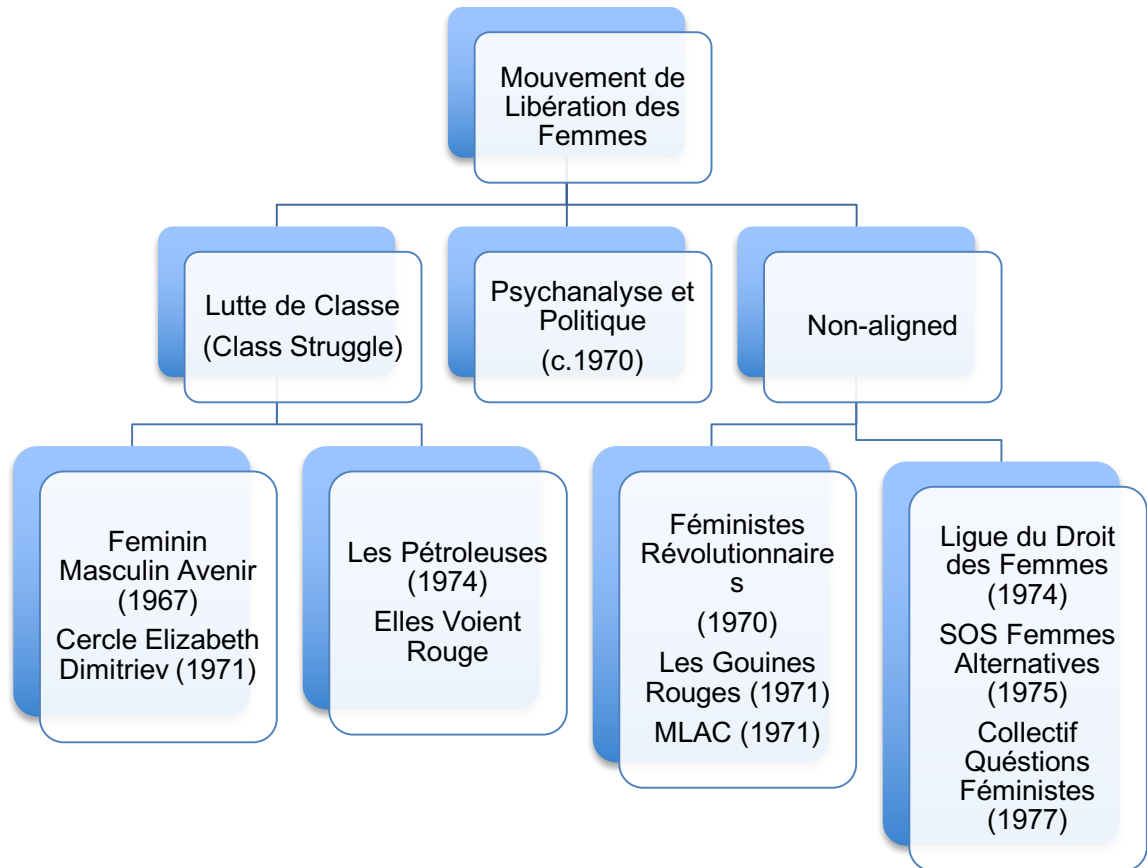
5. Legal and Financial Independence for Women.
6. The Right to a Self-Defined Sexuality.*

Passed at The National Women's Liberation Conference, Birmingham 1978.

7. Freedom for all women from intimidation by the threat or use of violence or sexual coercion, regardless of marital status, and an end to all the laws, assumptions, and institutions which perpetuate male dominance and men's aggression towards women.

*At the 1978 WLM Conference in Birmingham, this demand was changed to 'An end to all discrimination against lesbians.' The first section was rewritten as 'The Women's Liberation Movement asserts a woman's right to define her own sexuality' and was placed as a preface before the Seven Demands.

Appendix II: Overview of French Feminist Groups*



* This is not an exhaustive list of all groups and organisations associated with each current, merely an attempt to provide a brief overview of the general structure and nature of each current. In addition I have placed them in broad currents but they were not part of formal structures or directly linked to one another.

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As underlined, many of the sources consulted do not fit within the traditional definitions of primary/secondary material. Consequently, all published books and journal articles are classed together, not divided into primary/secondary. When I undertook archival research, The Women's Library London collection was housed at London Metropolitan University, it is now at London School of Economics, which may affect what is currently available. The sources I examined at the Feminist Archive North were uncatalogued, but are available on request.

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Collection Rape and Violence: 6WIM/F/15.

Collection Women's Liberation Movement: 6WIM/F/14.

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Documents relating to the English Collective of Prostitutes, Wages for Housework: 7EAW/C/08.

Pamphlets relating to WLM: 7LIM/04.

Papers of Elizabeth Wilson – Miscellaneous papers, letters, collected by Elizabeth Wilson: 7EAW W/B/4.

Various documents relating to the RCC: 5WRR/C/03.

Various printed material relating to WLM: 7SHR/P/02 – 7SHR/B/1.

Various WLM articles, papers and pamphlets including Wellclose Square Trust Prostitution Reports: 3AMS/B/16/1, 3AMS/B/16/03, 3AMS/B/16/05.

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Catcall

F.A.S.T.

Red Rag

Scarlet Women

Shrew

Spare Rib

Revolutionary and Radical Feminist Newsletter

W.I.R.E.S

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Collection Birth Control Campaign NAC and Co-Ord Dispute over Time Limit, 1978-9: SA/BCC/C28.

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des femmes en mouvements

Elles voient rouge

Femmes en lutte/Femme travailleuses en lutte

Histoire d'elles

Les Cahiers du féminisme

La Cause des femmes

La Revue d'en Face

Les Pétroleuses

Le Quotidien des femmes

Le Torchon brûle

Nouvelles Questions Féministes

Quand les femmes s'aiment

Questions Féministes

Sorcières

Other Political Newsletters/Journals

Partisans

Les Temps Modernes

Tout!

Bibliothèque de l'Hôtel de Ville

Newspapers/Journals

Le Monde

L'Unité

Libération

Bibliothèque des Archives

Newspapers/Journals.

L'Express

Bibliothèque Du Breuil

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